



OPEN LETTER:

STOP UNSUSTAINABLE COMMERCIAL EVENTS DESTROYING BROCKWELL PARK

Councillor Claire Holland
Leader of Lambeth Council
Lambeth Town Hall
1 Brixton Hill
London
SW2 1RW

21 April 2025

Dear Councillor Claire Holland

We, the undersigned community, parks, and nature organisations, are writing to express our collective concern over the ongoing commercialisation of Brockwell Park in the London Borough of Lambeth. Large-scale music events, such as Brockwell Live, inflict ecological damage, disrupt the peace, and disturb wildlife. Large swathes of the park are fenced off for several weeks each year, depriving local people of fully enjoying this beautiful recreational space. The size and location of the Park, surrounded by residential homes and tower blocks, is simply not suitable for holding multiple large-scale commercial music festivals.

We are not against appropriately run and appropriately scaled festivals and events. But we do challenge the assumption that Brockwell Park is the right site for such large and damaging events, particularly at this early time of year. Nor are we against events that enhance community cohesion, expression of identity and inclusion. Brockwell Park is inherently inclusive – it

welcomes all – but it can welcome nobody if its amenity and ecology is destroyed by huge festivals for festivals' sake.

It is against this backdrop that **we call on you to cease large-scale unsustainable events and to refuse this year's event permit so that Brockwell Park can begin to recover.**

Brockwell Park is a vibrant and vital green space of immense value to the people of Lambeth and nearby Southwark. Its sloping topography and historic design as formal parkland around the Grade II* listed Brockwell Hall, give it a landscape and amenity quality unmatched by other local spaces. The variety of character areas – including sweeping parkland, the walled garden, wildflower meadows, ponds, Lido, and sports facilities – allow enjoyment of the park in a multitude of ways. Its popularity, especially through the spring and summer, demonstrates the degree to which the park is cherished by local people of a range of ages and groups across a diverse community as an irreplaceable source of wellbeing, especially to those who lack a garden.

Additionally, Brockwell Park supports a diverse range of trees, including ancient oak, whitebeams, and elms, and is home to a variety of birds, as well as bats, swans, newts and toads and other wildlife. The park's many micro ecosystems and biodiversity make it an incredibly important asset in a nature-depleted borough.

Regrettably, in recent years, every May a steel fence over three metres high closes off a third of Brockwell Park to the public for the late spring and early summer. The public is further excluded from large tracts of the park following the festivals for the entirety of the summer due to damaged ground and the loss of grass cover. In 2024, the steel fence was in place for 37 consecutive days, and fencing continued for a total of 68 days because of the state of the ground. Much of the ground remained too damaged to use for the entire summer and on into the autumn and winter. Large tracts of grassland will not have recovered by the time of this year's proposed events.

Moreover, large-scale events in Brockwell Park cause or materially contribute to:

Loss of amenity & Public access: There is a significant and material loss of amenity. In 2024, approximately 45% amenity grassland was fenced off for 68 days during prime spring/summer months to enable set up, events, derig and incomplete restoration. Large areas were without grass all summer in 2024. The ordinary use of park grassland (e.g., for picnics, games, sunbathing, exercise, socialising, and simple relaxation) requires grass, not mud, hard or soft.

Essential pathways across the park linking Herne Hill to Tulse Hill were blocked for weeks, impacting walkers and commuters and especially wheelchair users and people with disabilities. The St Matthews Project Under 16's 11 a side home football pitch has been unusable for the last two years because of compaction and ground damage caused by festival events in 2023 and 2024.

Ecological harm: Large-scale events are now taking up approximately 35-50% of the available green space, causing irreversible damage by soil compaction and destruction to trees, old and newly planted, and to ecosystems which cannot be replaced. The impact of an estimated 285,000 attendees over 16 days this May/June during an unstable climate cannot be mitigated.

Flood risks: The compaction of the soil is resulting in increased flooding in an area already at high risk of floods.

Biodiversity loss: The following protected bats and birds were recorded in Brockwell Park during the period 2020-2021 when events were paused and have not been recorded since events resumed in August 2021, according to GiGL (Greenspace Information for Greater London): Pipistrelle bat; Common scoter; Fieldfare; Bramling; Kingfisher; Lesser redpoll; Skylark; White fronted Goose; Cuckoo; House Martin; Linnets; Spotted Flycatcher; Whinchat; Ring Ouzel; Short

eared Owl; Common Tern; Gadwall; Sand Martin; Reed Bunting; Pied flycatcher; Lesser black backed Gull, and Baltic Gull.

The commercial music festivals come in the height of nesting season, with significant disturbance to birds, bats, and other wildlife due to huge interference from extreme noise, lights, and many thousands of visitors; and last year trees were damaged by or cut back to give room to HGVs and infrastructure.

Trees within the event site and at its perimeter have begun to fail, this is likely due to the compaction of the ground, which weakens trees by inhibiting root growth, reducing water and nutrient uptake, and limiting oxygen availability. This causes structural weaknesses that allow for fungi infections, leading to tree failure and death.

Air pollution: The summer festivals require deliveries from huge lorries bringing added pollution into the park. On top of this the festivals require the operation of 26 generators, for lighting and CCTV, and although they use hydrotreated vegetable oil and not diesel the use of this fuel is by no means emission free. We want clean air in our park. Parks should serve as havens of clean air and tranquillity, not contribute further to environmental degradation.

Noise pollution: Noise from the construction during the day and during the night in the park is hugely disturbing to both local residents, and to wildlife disrupting their natural behaviours. Noise from the events is exacerbated by the cumulative effect of being repeated over three consecutive weekends. The noise from the events can be heard as far away as Streatham and Clapham. Soundchecks start in the morning and noise from events is continuous until 10:30pm, for six days over the May half term when students are preparing for important public exams.

Waste pollution: Last year, excrement waste from festival toilets overflowed. Some festival goers used local residents' gardens as toilets. Even today, plastic waste and glass, remain compressed in the soil.

Heritage damage: Brockwell Park is a valuable heritage site with Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. The Grade II Park and Grade II* Hall have protected status, which are being degraded by the fences and heavy foot traffic, devaluing its character. A 2025 Heritage Impact Report on the effects of annual events in Brockwell Park, concludes that the annual rota of events, including Brockwell Live, causes unacceptable long-term harm to both the historic character and fabric of the park.

Crime and nuisance: Large-scale events bring huge spikes in crime, noise, anti-social behaviour, and traffic congestion. In 2024, Metropolitan Police crime statistics showed that there was a 5,700% increase in drug crime; 1600% increase in theft; 800% increase in violent and sexual assaults in the immediate vicinity during the festivals.

Given the serious concerns above, we urge Lambeth Council to:

- Stop permitting unsustainable large-scale, multi-stage music festivals in Brockwell Park, a fragile green space, which cause irreparable ecological damage.
- Refuse the event permit for Brockwell Live 2025 and allow the grassland to lie fallow for at least one or more years so that it can begin to recover from the impact of repeated annual large-scale festivals.
- Halt the commercialisation of Brockwell Park and ensure full public consultations, evidence-based impact assessments and proper evaluation of the long-term impact on the park from these large-scale events.
- Ensure a full consultation on and support the development of an Events Strategy that respects Lambeth's obligations to the Park, which Lambeth holds in trust.

- Ensure good and proper remedial work to repair the significant damage done to the park in recent years from the private company that ran them.
- Explore alternative financial models and income-generating activities that can bring in revenue to the Council, including renting out the newly renovated Brockwell Hall (which cannot thrive as a wedding venue if it is surrounded by huge fences, overwhelming noise, and a damaged parkland).
- Explore alternative locations that are suitable to accommodate large-scale events, without causing harm to the environment.

We understand that Lambeth Council needs to find ways of generating income. However, the environmental impacts on the fabric of the park and wildlife, together with the sacrifices forced upon users and residents, are much too great to be balanced by entertainment benefits to only the festival-going section of society that can afford to attend these events.

Brockwell Park is a delightful recreational space where people come together and connect with nature. We therefore urge you to stop hosting unsustainable events and fully implement our recommendations to ensure that Brockwell Park remains a cherished sanctuary for both people and nature for current and future generations.

Yours sincerely

Lucy Akrill and Jen Hawkins

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