

Hackney Marshes User Group
c/o Hackney Marshes Staff Yard
Homerton Road
London E9 5PF

Hackney Marshes User Group
are volunteers who:

Organise walks round the Marshes, and explore and enhance their wildlife through planting and caring for trees and hedges.

Work to improve the Marshes for all sectors of the community, and campaign to protect them from inappropriate development.

Organise free activities and skill-sharing days, and run Hackney Community Tree Nursery & Forest Garden.



7 March 2013

To:
Hackney Gazette

From:
Hackney Marshes Users Group
Sustainable Hackney

Major Events Proposal for Hackney Marshes

Hackney council is proposing to use Hackney Marshes for up to three 'Major events' every summer, occupying the marsh for a whole 6 weeks between May and August. 'Major event' means an audience of anything between 20,000 and 100,000 as with Radio 1 Hackney Weekend (R1HW) in June 2012. To do this, it has changed its Green Space Events Policy, which used to restrict events use of the marsh football pitches to just June and July.

Radio 1 Hackney Weekend called into question whether such large events are right for the Marshes and showed us that, whatever the council may claim, they can't be trusted to run big events.

A month before Hackney Weekend, the council published a leaflet for local residents with a map of the event. There is no sign on the map of the notorious Green Wall which enclosed almost the whole main marsh 2 weeks before and afterwards, closing the beautiful woodland path along the old River Lea for four whole weeks. Bird hides, the outdoor gym, woodlands planted and tended by community groups, memorial trees planted by local people and new wildflower meadows were off limits for a month of the summer.

Rambling, bird-watching, jogging, community cycle rides, day centre walks, cricket, kite-flying, HMUG's programme of walks and ecological surveys, and of course football, were just some of the normal community activities curtailed or sacrificed. A security zone with private guards was thrown around the Green Flag winning Community Tree Nursery, making life difficult for our dedicated volunteers and course leaders and preventing passers-by from dropping in. Did the council really not know about these enclosures just a month before they happened? And how can they claim that major events 'encourage a greater range of activity and use of the Marsh' when the effect is to shut down so many different activities and uses?

The council claims "We are committed to reinstating any damage quickly after an event, as has been the case following the R1HW." But in March 2013 the paths from Daubeny Bridge, which

used to be grassy and accessible all winter, are still mud baths churned up and rutted by last year's lorries. Near the award-winning new Marsh Centre, compaction by heavy vehicles has left shallow ponds instead of grassland, and made hazardous slurry of a section of the brand new 'Olympic' cycle path. Will this damage ever be fixed and who will pay for it?

The council claims that events will earn money to be spent on parks. But it reportedly paid out £195,000 for fixing the marshes after Hackney Weekend – and they still aren't fixed.

Apparently the council intends to go ahead whatever the 'informal consultation' says. They will 'gauge public response and note any concerns' but they will still apply for planning permission for major events involving structures on the marsh.

Hackney Council must show that it can manage events competently and honestly and that it understands the social and environmental impacts of large events. Perhaps it could admit the mistakes it made with R1HW. Then we can talk about whether events like Radio 1 Hackney Weekend are suitable and sustainable for the Marshes in the first place. The answer from local people may well be no.

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