

THE FRIENDS OF FINSBURY PARK

Manor House Lodge, Seven Sisters Road, London, N4 2DE

@finsparkfriends | www.thefriendsoffinsburypark.org.uk | thefriendsoffinsburypark@gmail.com

[Note 21 April - on 17th April this letter was sent as a formal complaint to Haringey Council immediately after the weekend of 15/16 April. Council names, private comments have been removed from this public version. We await formal reply and answers to questions posed.]

TO: Haringey Council Leader, Cabinet Member for Parks, Chief Executive

Dear Cllr Ahmet and Cllr Hakata, Mr Donald

Complaint

The Friends of Finsbury Park, on behalf of its members and local residents in the three boroughs surrounding it, are writing to lodge a formal complaint regarding the lease of the whole park, the absent and lax supervision of licensees, and damage done by Tough Mudder on the weekend of 15th and 16th April 2023.

Context

Finsbury Park is held in Trust by Haringey Council on behalf of the people. We think this is an important framing principle to keep in mind on this issue, and the expectations that residents have of Haringey Council.

In seeking to (erroneously, in our opinion) approve 5 years of major events in Finsbury Park, the Council has pointed to its manifesto commitments as justification. To that end, the Council's Parks and Green Spaces Strategy state:

- *"There is a need to try and better protect those natural spaces from both inappropriate use and overuse"*
- *"The need to better protect natural spaces from inappropriate use through clearer policy with enhanced enforcement to support policy"*
- *"Supporting the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency by reducing the carbon footprint of parks and greenspaces, protecting and promoting biodiversity and helping educate everyone in Haringey about contributing towards saving the planet"*

The weekend's events breach these commitments on many levels, and we think the actions show a callous regard for residents for whom it holds this space in trust.

Event

Tough Mudder is a military style assault course, running over 2 days, with 7,500 people a day. Whilst it has been in Finsbury Park previously, this year is materially worse:

1. **The scale:** the event has covered the whole park, and in many respect has proved worse than the major music festivals of the summer
2. **The ground impact:** deliberate or not, weather impacted or not, fields and areas have been churned up, exacerbated with water being imported to site; no 'matting' was placed down when it was apparent massive damage would happen unnecessarily - e.g. reservoir
3. **Wildlife:** this time of year is nesting season; the 'quiet' areas of the park should be left for birds but has been massively disturbed with setup and runners. The trampled grass and disturbance to Haringey Council's designated 'nature' parts of the park during spring will be very damaging to an already declining insect population.

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4. **Sensitivity:** The promoter had courses looped around memorial trees. Surreal.
5. **Environment:** The course tracked through / past recently planted fruit trees.
6. **Pollution:** the event had 5 large generators running, many smaller, numerous HGVs, and other large vehicles trucking in water (!). Reconcile to ULEZ, commitments in manifesto, it being a park, etc.
7. **Users:** a group of autistic youths got in touch to say they had left the park early; a very broad section of the community has expressed their amazement (we spoke to drug dealers in the park, parents, event members of the event themselves). A number of elderly users reported concern at slippery paths from mud dispersed on the carriage way.
8. **Biodiversity:** the course plots through areas demarcated for urban forest / other areas of regeneration
9. **Safety:** HGVs moved without supervision, above 5 mph on the internal carriage way. 3 residents reported near misses with low-loaders importing equipment

Timeline, Council Management & Supervision

In response to member concerns (aka Haringey citizens), the Friends of Finsbury Park wrote to the events department morning 13th April. This email clearly set out reasonable concerns around the setup and supervision. It was ignored. We sent a follow up email close of business the next day (14th). This set out 6 specific concerns. It was also ignored. FOFP members visited site each day that week; we could find no members of the events team on site. When we asked park maintenance staff on the first event day (15th) specifically whether [name removed], [name removed] or anyone else senior was planning to be on site that weekend, they said no. When we asked the only Haringey Council representative we could find on site on 16th April - a relatively junior individual typically responsible for litter - when the damage was manifest, he said **as the land use agreement had been signed, they were powerless to do anything.**

We were able to find the MD for Tough Mudder events 14th April, the night before opening. He engaged us decently, agreed with our concerns, and asked his staff to make some urgent adjustments. That said, the mud and other damage was already done. [Comments removed pending clarification from Haringey Council].

The FOFP lacks power to tell a promoter what to do; but had Haringey Council event officers been on site, seen it with their own eyes, perhaps something could have been done before the damage took real hold. Cllr Hakata was decent enough to come down late 15th April, and accepted an offer to join his review. [Private comments removed].

In short: once again, when the Council leases out Finsbury Park, it shows appalling management pre during and after events. Comms are non-existent. Licensees are left to their own devices, with members of the public reporting the same basic issues time and time again. We have barely - barely! - seen repairs from major events last summer, and residents will now have to suffer a damaged park well up to major events this year. Awful.

Reminder: Finsbury Park is held by Haringey Council in trust - for the citizens. There is no financial 'upside' for running events to cross subsidising other services. The nominal cultural uplift is more than offset by the negative side affects and media coverage the council receives as a result. Really, is it worth it?

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5 years: the Council is attempting to agree a 5 year deal with LiveNation, and sign an agreement to extend events in the summer. Noting our response - un-answered - and scepticism around any upside for park users; **this major incident is another reason NOT to sign a 5 year deal with a promoter, to give the council flexibility to respond, and control to events.** The defence put forward that existing conditions put in place provide protection, do not stack up in light of this weekend's events.

Complaint

We would like a thorough review of events big and small in Finsbury Park, done with the public. We have received no reply to our considered response to the 5 year major event proposal and would like one. Further to that, we like a specific review into this weekend, and would ask that the review consider:

1. Who signed off this event? Who takes accountability for this approval? What scrutiny was given for all aspects?
2. In the review process, what environmental, bio-diversity, ecological assessment was done? What guidance was given the event promoter? Did the Council give permission to the 'muddying' done by the promoter? How does the council consider climate change in the licensing process?
3. What credible improvements will be taken to the way the events team manage events in Finsbury Park? What review will be undertaken around the way events are supervised? How can the events team be more pro-active? What was the schedule of event team (n.b. Not Finsbury park maintenance staff) in the park for the week before, weekend and after? And why were they not apparent at key moments of setup?
4. Why were emails from the FOFPP not engaged on, and why was action not taken prior to the event causing such damage?
5. What was the damage deposit taken; how will it be incremented; what does the Council estimate the costs to be to fix and is this sufficient?
6. What is the recovery plan to get the park ready for May bank holiday?
7. When will a baseline, independent, monitoring exercise of air, soil, wildlife be undertaken, and will pre / during / post major event reviews be taken?
8. Could the council have stopped the event if it decided the impact was obviously going to be negative? Why was it not stopped when this was apparent Friday PM?

Summary

We, and thousand more in the community, are so so saddened at the impact this weekend. The council has to take ultimate responsibility for its customer's behaviour and we implore you to stay true to the public commitments you made to your constituents, to protect the park and its environment and our air quality and be better custodians of our fantastic and needed park.

Please say NO to these destructive events in Finsbury Park and treat it like a park that you hold in Trust for all of us and for future generations. You should not approve a 5 year deal with Live Nation, or other parties until the community has confidence in the custodianship of the space.

We look forward to hearing from you both and receiving answers so we may report back to the rightly devastated community.

We look forward to continuing working with you to protect and improve Finsbury Park.

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Regards

Bethany Anderson and Tom Graham

Co - chairs The Friends of Finsbury Park