# Brockwell Park festival row exposes clash between community green space and commercial events



In the heart of Brixton, Brockwell Park stands as a sanctuary of greenery amidst London’s urban sprawl—yet this summer, it faces a tumultuous battle between cultural celebration and community preservation. With the annual 'Brockwell Live' festivals kicking off, tensions have escalated following a recent High Court ruling that affirmed the local council's actions regarding the use of the park were unlawful, yet allowed the festivals to proceed. This situation has galvanised the campaign group Protect Brockwell Park, headed by Rebecca Shaman, which argues for more responsible stewardship of the park.

The High Court intervention was sparked by concerns over the extensive duration of the festivals, which exceeded the legally permitted 28 days of temporary use within public parks. Despite the ruling, Lambeth Council issued a certificate of lawfulness allowing for continued events such as Wide Awake and Mighty Hoopla, highlighting the pressures councils now face for revenue generation amid budget constraints. This paradox is striking, as the council cites potential economic benefits from festivals—citing that events in parks like Finsbury and Victoria Park have generated millions—while opponents argue that public access and park integrity are being compromised for profit.

Among the dissenting voices is local resident Jen Hawkins, who expressed to the Daily Express her dismay over diminished public access and environmental degradation. “It's such a shame that they use our beautiful public space as a cash cow,” she remarked. The crux of the dispute lies in a perceived lack of transparency and community consultation concerning the frequency and scale of these events. Many local residents depend on the park as their primary connection to nature, and the encroachment of commercial events threatens this relationship, particularly for those without personal green spaces.

Concerns about environmental sustainability have intensified, especially following observations of damaged grass and trees during and after festival periods in previous years. Celebrity voices, including Sir Mark Rylance, have added gravitas to the argument against the festivals, calling for a reconsideration of how Lambeth Council manages the park’s use. Rylance poignantly remarked that the tents and high steel walls erected for events transform the park into “a prison camp,” obstructing both the visual appeal and ecological balance of the space.

As the festivals gear up to entertain an estimated 285,000 attendees, balancing cultural enrichment and environmental stewardship remains paramount. These events are positioned as vital for fostering cultural diversity—supporters contend that they engage younger and ethnically diverse audiences, with data demonstrating a disparity in festival attendance across demographic lines. Yet critics argue that the long-term consequences of commercialising public spaces could overshadow short-term cultural benefits.

The Protect Brockwell Park campaign has not only mobilised local residents but also initiated crowdfunding efforts to challenge the current use of the park. Their aim is to raise £30,000 for legal costs associated with potential future actions against council decisions and private event companies, underscoring the need for broader community involvement in shaping future policies regarding public spaces.

With the festivals underway and community tensions palpable, the unfolding situation in Brockwell Park reflects a broader commentary on urban planning, public access, and cultural practices in London. As residents and local authorities navigate this complex landscape, the outcome may serve as a bellwether for other parks and green spaces facing similar pressures across the city.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2059496/we-live-park-fenced-off-cash-brockwell-brixton), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/4d70a5b0-3ec2-4f92-83c5-8d3450d1f1f3), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/0dbe0089-c93c-47a3-bcf7-a0c5038b289f), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/e9389e54-3dd2-460a-a9de-895e05664a10)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2059496/we-live-park-fenced-off-cash-brockwell-brixton), [[5]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/brockwell-park-brixton-wide-awake-cross-the-tracks-mighty-hoopla-b1223948.html), [[7]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/brockwell-park-live-festivals-mark-rylance-lambeth-council-b2737962.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2059496/we-live-park-fenced-off-cash-brockwell-brixton), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/4d70a5b0-3ec2-4f92-83c5-8d3450d1f1f3), [[4]](https://www.brixtonbuzz.com/2025/03/crowdfunder-launched-to-challenge-the-use-of-brockwell-park-for-summer-festivals/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/0dbe0089-c93c-47a3-bcf7-a0c5038b289f), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/e9389e54-3dd2-460a-a9de-895e05664a10), [[7]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/brockwell-park-live-festivals-mark-rylance-lambeth-council-b2737962.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2059496/we-live-park-fenced-off-cash-brockwell-brixton), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/4d70a5b0-3ec2-4f92-83c5-8d3450d1f1f3), [[4]](https://www.brixtonbuzz.com/2025/03/crowdfunder-launched-to-challenge-the-use-of-brockwell-park-for-summer-festivals/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/brockwell-park-brixton-wide-awake-cross-the-tracks-mighty-hoopla-b1223948.html), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/e9389e54-3dd2-460a-a9de-895e05664a10)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2059496/we-live-park-fenced-off-cash-brockwell-brixton> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/4d70a5b0-3ec2-4f92-83c5-8d3450d1f1f3> - London's summer festival scene, including events like Raver Tots and Mighty Hoopla, has become a contentious issue between local councils, residents, and event organizers. With festivals occupying London parks for a combined 140 days in 2025—a 14% increase from the previous year—residents argue the events limit public access, damage the environment, and create noise pollution. Councils, facing significant budget shortfalls due to central government cuts, see these festivals as vital revenue sources. For example, Finsbury Park and Victoria Park generated £1.2 million and £1.6 million respectively from such events. A legal dispute over Brockwell Park in Lambeth highlighted these tensions. A High Court ruling found the council exceeded legal limits on event durations, yet festivals are proceeding under a newly approved certificate. The Protect Brockwell Park group continues legal efforts to stop them, while facing lawsuits from organizers. Critics warn of the risks of commercializing public spaces and the lack of strong negotiation positions by councils against powerful festival operators. Nonetheless, supporters argue that festivals serve cultural purposes and benefit younger and ethnically diverse audiences, with 27% of ethnic minorities having attended festivals versus 19% of white Londoners.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/0dbe0089-c93c-47a3-bcf7-a0c5038b289f> - A controversy has erupted in London's Brockwell Park over the hosting of large-scale music festivals, spotlighting the tension between public enjoyment and preservation of green spaces. Lambeth Council’s plan to host six festivals drawing an estimated 285,000 attendees triggered a legal battle, with a High Court judge ruling the council lacked the necessary planning permissions. Local resistance intensified after trees were removed for festival preparations and last year's events left the park damaged and muddy. Notable figures like Sir Mark Rylance have criticized the events for harming the park's ecosystem. Campaigners have raised concerns about increased crime, citing a significant spike in drug offenses during festival periods. In contrast, the council and event organizer Superstruct argue the festivals create cultural opportunities and economic benefits, though critics dispute the allocation of profits. Political ramifications include a Green Party victory on a pledge to protect the park, contrasting with Labour's prior dominance. The debate underscores broader questions about the commercialization of public spaces and the balance between access, cultural events, and environmental stewardship.
4. <https://www.brixtonbuzz.com/2025/03/crowdfunder-launched-to-challenge-the-use-of-brockwell-park-for-summer-festivals/> - A group calling itself Protect Brockwell Park have launched a crowdfunder to build a fighting fund to ‘protect Brockwell Park for everyone.” Their stated arms are to stop the commercialisation, destruction and fencing off of the Park, force a full consultation on the development of the Council’s Events Strategy and to get the private events companies to pay for the damage caused. They are looking to raise £30,000 to pay for “legal costs to enable potential challenges to the Events Permit, licensing and planning procedures, and accompanying experts’ reports.”
5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/brockwell-park-brixton-wide-awake-cross-the-tracks-mighty-hoopla-b1223948.html> - Festival organisers who run events in Brockwell Park have paid over £300,000 to help look after the green space. Neighbours have launched a legal challenge against Lambeth Council following concerns about festivals in Brockwell Park. The organiser of large musical festivals held in Brockwell Park have “welcomed scrutiny” after campaigners launched a legal challenge to protect the beloved green space from large-scale private events. Brockwell Live, which hosts festivals in the park, including LGBTQ friendly Mighty Hoopla and critically acclaimed jazz and funk festival Cross the Tracks, has defended itself, insisting it takes its “stewardship seriously”. It comes after nearby residents have complained that the festivals are permanently damaging the park, with the Oscar-winning actor Sir Mark Rylance claiming the events have turned the space “into a prison camp”.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/e9389e54-3dd2-460a-a9de-895e05664a10> - The High Court has ruled that Lambeth Council acted irrationally by approving a series of summer festivals in Brockwell Park without adhering to planning law, posing a potential setback for London’s live music sector. Judge Tim Mould KC determined the council breached rules allowing only 28 days of commercial activity in parks without additional planning permission, with festivals in Brockwell expected to last 37 days due to setup and breakdown periods. The legal challenge, initiated by local resident Rebekah Shaman and advocacy group Protect Brockwell Park, highlighted concerns over restricted public access and environmental damage. Although the court did not halt the imminent events, Lambeth Council must revisit its approval process. Protect Brockwell Park emphasized they support festivals but advocate for responsible use of green spaces. The festivals, including Wide Awake, Field Day, and Mighty Hoopla, attract over 285,000 attendees annually and contribute financially to the council. Some are operated by Superstruct, a private equity-backed events firm. Lambeth Council stated it is reviewing the judgment and considering next steps.
7. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/brockwell-park-live-festivals-mark-rylance-lambeth-council-b2737962.html> - Now, Academy Award-winning actor – and local resident – Sir Mark Rylance has waded into the row, demanding the council reconsider its backing of the events as he condemned the destruction wreaked by the walls built for the festivals. The Wolf Hall star said: “Brockwell Park is a place for people and nature. It is essential to many people’s mental health, to our joy, our healing grief. It was a gift to the local community and is held in trust for us by Lambeth. The imposition of high steel walls for Brockwell Live every summer destroys the park for weeks and harms the grass, trees and plant life for months — if not forever. It turns it into a prison camp. I fully support this campaign to legally challenge our Lambeth governors and make a new arrangement for our park.