# Hampstead Heath ponds face cultural clash over gender inclusivity and legal reforms



The City of London Corporation (CLC) has launched a public consultation on the future access arrangements for Hampstead Heath’s renowned bathing ponds, including the Kenwood Ladies’, Highgate Men’s, and Hampstead Mixed ponds. The consultation, which runs until 25 November 2025, explores six possible approaches to gender inclusivity, including the controversial option of barring transgender individuals from using single-sex ponds that align with their gender identity, restricting them instead to the mixed pond. This development signals a possible shift from the current policy, which permits transgender men and women to use whichever single-sex pond they feel is appropriate.

The consultation forms part of a broader review by the CLC following a Supreme Court ruling in April 2025 that clarified the legal meaning of ‘sex’ under the Equality Act 2010. This judgment has prompted the Corporation to reassess its policies to ensure they comply with evolving legal interpretations and obligations. The CLC chair of policy, Chris Hayward, emphasised the sensitivity of the issue, stating the consultation aims to give all stakeholders a fair and respectful opportunity to voice their views while balancing legal, equality, safeguarding, and practical considerations.

The current arrangement has been contentious for several years, triggering significant protests and campaigns. Feminist campaigners and some women’s rights groups have voiced strong objections, arguing that allowing transgender women to use the female-only ponds undermines privacy and dignity. They have staged notable protests, including one in 2018 where women donned fake beards and moustaches to storm the men’s pond, and a similar demonstration in May 2025 involving around 30 women chanting slogans and attempting to enter the male-only pond while wearing disguises. Maya Forstater, Chief Executive of campaign group Sex Matters, highlighted the concerns about preserving female-only spaces, arguing that allowing transgender women, defined as those legally recognized under gender reassignment laws, compromises the female-only environment.

However, advocates for transgender inclusivity contend that trans swimmers have been part of the Hampstead Heath community for decades without issue. They warn that forcing transgender individuals, particularly trans men who may have masculine features or facial hair, into single-sex spaces that do not reflect their gender identity could lead to humiliating and potentially unsafe confrontations. This perspective is supported by groups and users who view the move to exclude transgender swimmers as punitive and lacking compassion.

Since 2019, the City of London Corporation adopted a gender identity policy compliant with the Equality Act 2010 that allowed transgender women access to the women’s pond, a decision supported by the Kenwood Ladies’ Pond Association (KLPA). The KLPA voted decisively against a motion to restrict access to those born female only, advocating for respectful and civil discussions around the issue. The Corporation’s policy reflects the wider legal and social context, including guidance from organisations like Stonewall, which affirm transgender people’s rights to access services in line with their gender identity.

Nonetheless, these developments continue to stir debate. The CLC has indicated that while the consultation results will be a critical source of insight, decisions will also consider equalities impact assessments and safeguarding requirements. In response to users’ concerns, collaborations are underway to explore options for additional privacy provisions during changing and showering at the ponds.

As this consultation progresses, it represents a significant moment in the ongoing national and local dialogue around transgender rights, single-sex spaces, and community values. The outcome will likely shape not only the future of Hampstead Heath’s bathing ponds but also set a precedent for managing gender inclusivity in public recreational spaces.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15161769/Hampstead-Heath-ponds-set-finally-ban-transgender-swimmers-female-bathers-donned-mankinis-fake-beards-protest.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/city-of-london-corporation-launches-public-consultation-on-hampstead-heath-bathing-ponds/), [[3]](https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/hampstead-heath/activities-at-hampstead-heath/swimming-at-hampstead-heath/have-your-say-on-hampstead-heaths-swimming-ponds)
* Paragraph 2 – [[4]](https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/hampstead-heath/activities-at-hampstead-heath/swimming-at-hampstead-heath/supreme-court-ruling-2025), [[2]](https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/city-of-london-corporation-launches-public-consultation-on-hampstead-heath-bathing-ponds/), [[3]](https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/hampstead-heath/activities-at-hampstead-heath/swimming-at-hampstead-heath/have-your-say-on-hampstead-heaths-swimming-ponds)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15161769/Hampstead-Heath-ponds-set-finally-ban-transgender-swimmers-female-bathers-donned-mankinis-fake-beards-protest.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-48380940)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15161769/Hampstead-Heath-ponds-set-finally-ban-transgender-swimmers-female-bathers-donned-mankinis-fake-beards-protest.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-68494843), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-48380940)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://news.sky.com/story/transgender-women-given-full-access-to-ladies-only-hampstead-heath-pond-11727128), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-68494843), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-48380940)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15161769/Hampstead-Heath-ponds-set-finally-ban-transgender-swimmers-female-bathers-donned-mankinis-fake-beards-protest.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/city-of-london-corporation-launches-public-consultation-on-hampstead-heath-bathing-ponds/), [[5]](https://news.sky.com/story/transgender-women-given-full-access-to-ladies-only-hampstead-heath-pond-11727128), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-68494843)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15161769/Hampstead-Heath-ponds-set-finally-ban-transgender-swimmers-female-bathers-donned-mankinis-fake-beards-protest.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/city-of-london-corporation-launches-public-consultation-on-hampstead-heath-bathing-ponds/> - The City of London Corporation has initiated a public consultation to gather feedback on future access arrangements for Hampstead Heath's bathing ponds. The consultation, running until 25 November 2025, seeks input from pond users, the local community, and stakeholders on how the Kenwood Ladies', Highgate Men's, and Hampstead Mixed ponds should operate in the future. The City Corporation aims to ensure that decisions are made in a fair, respectful, and transparent manner, in line with the law, while considering legal requirements, equality impacts, safeguarding, and practical implementation.
3. <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/hampstead-heath/activities-at-hampstead-heath/swimming-at-hampstead-heath/have-your-say-on-hampstead-heaths-swimming-ponds> - The City of London Corporation has launched a public consultation on future access arrangements at Hampstead Heath's swimming ponds. The consultation focuses on whether these facilities should operate as exclusively single-sex spaces, mixed-sex spaces, or trans-inclusive spaces. The Corporation aims to understand how people use the ponds, what they value most, and how they think these unique facilities should operate in the future. Feedback will help inform a final decision to be made by the Corporation's committees in the coming months. The consultation runs until 25 November 2025.
4. <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/hampstead-heath/activities-at-hampstead-heath/swimming-at-hampstead-heath/supreme-court-ruling-2025> - Following the Supreme Court's judgment in April 2025, which clarified the meaning of 'sex' in the Equality Act 2010, the City of London Corporation is reviewing its access policies, including those at Hampstead Heath's Bathing Ponds. The Corporation is engaging with service users and other stakeholders to ensure decisions are informed and meet legal duties. The current arrangements remain in place during the review, with the consultation running until 25 November 2025.
5. <https://news.sky.com/story/transgender-women-given-full-access-to-ladies-only-hampstead-heath-pond-11727128> - The City of London Corporation has granted transgender women full access to the ladies-only swimming pond at Hampstead Heath. This decision follows a public consultation in which a majority supported access for transgender individuals. The Corporation's policy aims to ensure that public services do not discriminate against trans people, upholding equality and basic human rights. The move has been welcomed by the Kenwood Ladies' Pond Association, which is in discussions with the Corporation to provide additional privacy for changing and showering for users with concerns.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-68494843> - Transgender women will be allowed to continue using the Hampstead Ladies' Pond after a vote by the Kenwood Ladies' Pond Association (KLPA). The KLPA rejected a motion proposing that only those born female could use the pond. The City of London Corporation, which manages the facility, adopted a new gender identity policy in 2019 to be fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010, allowing transgender women to use the pond. The KLPA emphasized the importance of conducting debates with civility and respect.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-48380940> - The City of London Corporation has formalised the rights of transgender women to use the women-only pond at Hampstead Heath. Under the new policy, swimmers can use ponds aligning with their gender identity. Admission is granted on a case-by-case basis. Stonewall, the LGBT campaigning organisation, stated that the 2010 Equality Act already protected trans people from discrimination when accessing services. However, some feminist campaigners have criticised the policy, expressing concerns about its impact on women.