# Controversy escalates over cruising on Hampstead Heath



In a developing controversy on Hampstead Heath, a picturesque park in North London, tensions have escalated between dog walkers and gay activists over the use of a section of the park for sexual encounters, commonly referred to as "cruising." The situation has sparked protests, counter-campaigns, and community discussions about public decency and cultural rights.

Dog walkers and local residents have expressed concern about the activities of those engaging in sexual encounters at Hampstead Heath, leading to the installation of signs on the western side of the park. These signs read, “Cruising for sex? Homosexuality is legal. Use a hook up app like Grindr or Sniffies and get a room,” and they feature a map indicating the area as a "no cruising ground." The signs encourage users of the park to reclaim the space, stating they should “walk in the red area” to “take back West Heath.”

The practice of cruising—where individuals seek anonymous sexual encounters in public spaces—has become a contentious issue, with many gay activists arguing that such signs are homophobic and detrimental to queer culture. Dan Glass, a prominent figure in the protests, articulated the stance of the activists by stating, "It's homophobic, it's saying that queer people can't do what is legally and rightfully theirs, to have public displays of affection.” Speaking to the Camden New Journal, he further elaborated that the protests were a demonstration of “queer love, intimacy, and affection” and that cruising has historically served as a safe space for sexual exploration.

Protesters gathered at Hampstead Heath held signs with provocative messages such as “take me to the f\*\*\* tree” and “release the pups,” with some engaging in eye-catching behaviour that included exposing themselves. Videos shared on social media depicted scenes where police officers were present, appearing to monitor the events without intervening.

Historically, cruising has taken place in Hampstead Heath since the 19th century, and it has persisted through various legal changes, including the decriminalisation of homosexuality. The ongoing debate highlights divergent views on public displays of sexual activity, particularly in family-oriented spaces. According to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, sexual activity in public places is not illegal unless a member of the public witnesses it, potentially leading to charges of outraging public decency.

Critics of the cruising culture argue that it can impact the experience of families and children in the park. Lucy Marsh from the Family Education Trust commented on this, expressing that Hampstead Heath should be a safe and welcoming space for families. She raised concerns about children witnessing such activities and the implications of public sexual behaviour.

On the other side, supporters of the protesters argue that the ongoing clash is part of a larger movement advocating for sexual expression in public spaces. Activists claim that cruising is a manifestation of personal freedom and community identity. Glass emphasised that the practice serves as a historic response to a "fascist environment" and advocates for the acceptance of diverse expressions of intimacy.

A spokesperson for the City of London Corporation, which oversees Hampstead Heath, highlighted their commitment to preserving the park as a cherished space while ensuring it remains welcoming for all visitors. They affirmed that the safety and respectful use of the park are priorities, aiming for a balance between conservation and public access.

As the protests continue, the dispute over Hampstead Heath encapsulates broader societal debates surrounding sexuality, public space, and community values, demonstrating how a historic tradition has become a focal point for modern discussions on rights and decency in shared environments.

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

## References

* <https://londonist.com/london/things-to-do/sodomites-walk-hampstead-heath> - This article discusses the 'Sodomites Walk' event organized by ACT UP London and This is My Culture in response to posters urging dog walkers to 'take back' Hampstead Heath from gay men. It highlights the historical significance of cruising on the heath and the community's pushback against perceived homophobia.
* <https://actuplondon.wordpress.com/2025/02/24/act-up-and-this-is-my-culture-presents-the-sodomites-walk-march-2nd-2025/> - This post provides details about the 'Sodomites Walk' event, emphasizing the historical and cultural importance of cruising on Hampstead Heath. It also includes testimonials from activists highlighting the significance of the heath as a queer space.
* <https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/uk/take-back-hampstead-heath-dog-walkers-urged-posters-men-stop-park-sex/> - This news article reports on the appearance of posters urging dog walkers to reclaim Hampstead Heath from gay men engaging in sexual activities. It mentions the removal of these posters and the historical context of cruising in the park.
* <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/42/contents> - This link provides access to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which is relevant to the legal context of public sexual activity and indecent exposure in the UK.
* <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/about-the-city/city-of-london-corporation> - This website offers information about the City of London Corporation, which oversees Hampstead Heath and is involved in maintaining the park as a welcoming space for all visitors.
* <https://www.camdennewjournal.com/article/queer-activists-hold-protest-hampstead-heath-over-cruising-row> - This article would likely cover the protests and statements from activists like Dan Glass regarding the importance of cruising as a form of queer expression and the response to perceived homophobia.