

## **Deputation Request & Briefing: Petition to Restore Cemetery Opening Hours**

**Submitted by:** Jill Henry – Fortune Green resident

**On behalf of:** 1060+ Signatories of the petition to Camden Council

**Petition Link:**

[change.org - Restore the Seasonal Opening Hours at Hampstead Cemetery](https://change.org/petitions/Restore-the-Seasonal-Opening-Hours-at-Hampstead-Cemetery)

### **Summary of the Request**

- We are requesting that Camden Council/Culture & Environment Scrutiny Committee revisit its policy regarding restricted opening hours at Hampstead Cemetery, with a view to **restoring access during longer daylight months** (spring/summer/autumn), particularly in the **early evenings**. This was done before and most of Camden Green spaces are currently open from 07.30 to dusk.
- The 720+ strong petition makes it a strong and representative expression of public concern. Most of these signatories are Camden residents who value the cemetery not just as a resting place, but as a vital, peaceful, and green space for reflection, and connection to nature in an increasingly dense urban environment.

### **Why This Matters**

#### **- Health & Wellbeing**

Access to green space is directly linked to public health, as recognised in national and local policy. For elderly residents, new parents, those with mobility needs, and locals who rely on carer-assisted walks, limited hours during warmer months make it impossible to access the cemetery when it's safest and most pleasant to do so. Places like Hampstead Heath too far.

**Example:** One neighbour recovering from hip surgery was unable to visit the cemetery with carer assistance due to afternoon constraints/carers availability.

#### **- Inclusion & Accessibility**

The restriction of hours disproportionately affects older people, carers, and working residents who may only be free early or late in the day. With the recent and very welcomed addition of accessible, six-figure investment toilets, the Council has shown a commitment to improving the site - but this improvement is undermined by limited access. What's the value in upgrading facilities that residents can't use?

#### **- Environmental and Community Value**

Hampstead Cemetery is 26 acres of green space used by many residents who walk its paths daily for mental clarity, physical exercise, and seasonal connection. The Council's Climate Action and Biodiversity strategies should recognise the importance of protecting not just green space itself, but access to it.

#### **- Local Precedent**

Hampstead Cemetery successfully operated seasonal hours for many years before Covid, so why not restore? This space serves dual roles - **as a resting place and as a valued community resource**.

**Volunteer Involvement – A Note of Caution** We welcome support from Cllr Lorna Greenwood who has recently had a meeting with Cabinet Member and Senior Officer. Also, Cllr Sharon Hardwick who raised the restricted hours at this very committee in March 2023. It is appreciated that the Council is now engaging with the residents and recognising the public feeling, evidenced by our simple and local-led campaign.

While the suggestion of reintroducing volunteers to support extended access is noted/welcomed, we are concerned about the potential framing of access as conditional on volunteer participation.

During Covid-19, I helped coordinate volunteers to keep the cemetery open and safe — something I remain proud of. However, we must not create a precedent where a core public service is dependent on unpaid labour, especially given:

- Volunteer fatigue and shortages,
- The risk of setting up a system designed to fail, or “community did not step up”.

We would want Hampstead Cemetery opening hours to operate in line with other green spaces, none of which we know are doing so based on volunteer cooperation.

We urge the Council to **consider community support as a supplement, not a substitute** for properly funded and governed access. Very many of the people who would benefit from the restored access are not able to be volunteers, due to vulnerability.

### Timeline & Expectations

While we recognise that this summer is now partly lost, there is still time to consider an **adjustment before autumn** - or at the very least, to offer a clear commitment and timeline for implementation ahead of Spring/Summer 2026. Local people should not lose another year of safe and beneficial access to a space that clearly means so much.

### Topics for Discussion

We respectfully ask the Scrutiny Committee and Council officers to consider and respond to the following topics:

- **Health equity and public health value** of extended cemetery access, especially for elderly and less mobile residents.
- **Comparative access policies** in other Camden green spaces.
- **Transparency around anti-social behaviour data** and if or how this has been used to justify restricted hours.
- **Feasibility of a pilot** extended hours scheme on a seasonal or trial basis.
- **Clarification on costs:** actual operational costs vs. assumptions; costs of other parks and green spaces for comparison.
- **Position on volunteer dependence:** will access be conditional on local groups sustaining unpaid support?

### Key Questions for the Council

- **Has Camden conducted a formal cost estimate** for extended spring/summer hours at Hampstead Cemetery? If so, what are the figures and assumptions, and do they compare to those costs of extended hours at other green spaces?

- **What specific ASB data supports current restrictions?** Can a summary be shared with residents and councillors?
- **What options exist for a pilot or phased trial of extended hours**, perhaps starting with weekends or evenings only?
- **Would any pilot be professionally monitored and reviewed**, or reliant on volunteers?
- **Would failure to sustain volunteer support result in reduced hours again?** If so, is this a fair and viable model of service delivery?

## **Conclusion & Request**

This petition reflects the deep value Hampstead Cemetery holds for the community. It is a place of remembrance, but also of renewal, health, and peace. Camden residents deserve thoughtful access to this space, especially when it aligns with borough-wide commitments to inclusion, wellbeing, and environmental access.

The cemetery is very much respected by locals, young parents, elders, dog walkers. We are aware of complaints regarding dogs but would like to stress that the majority of dog owners are responsible and have gone to massive effort to assist with issues and we are often described as “the eyes and ears of the cemetery”, deterring and reporting ASB.

We respectfully request that the Scrutiny Committee give this matter full and serious consideration, and that **a clear and timely process be set out for reviewing and reinstating longer opening hours**, in a way that is fair and inclusive.

We thank you for your attention and welcome further engagement on this issue.