

RESIDENTS' VIEWS ON THE MUSIC FESTIVALS AT COPTHALL PLAYING FIELDS MILL HILL 20-21 AUGUST 2022

Jointly produced and published by the
Mill Hill Residents' Association (MHRA) & Mill Hill Preservation Society (MHPS)
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1. INTRODUCTION

The two music festivals held in Copthall Playing Fields, 51st State on Saturday 20th and Titan Festival on Sunday 21st August 2022, were both licensed for a maximum of 10,000 attendees. The number of tickets sold in advance was 9,000 for 51st State and 6,000 for Titan, as stated by the organisers [1].

According to information on the 51st State Festival's website <https://www.51stfestival.com> the festival celebrates the roots of house music. The event pulls together the various threads of house music taking festival-goers on a journey through classic house, tech house, afro house, garage, disco, soul, dancehall and more. The event includes many artists from diverse places such as Chicago, New York, Detroit and London.

2. WHY THE SURVEY?

The 51st State Festival was previously held in Trent Park from 2015 until 2019 [2]. After the summer of 2019 the licence was not renewed because of the negative impact it was having on local residents. The number of attendees started at 10,000 in 2015, grew to 15,000 in 2018 and then 17,500 in 2019 [2]. The Elrow Town festival held at Trent Park in 2019 had 25,000 attendees [3].

Issues that residents were forced to suffer, as reported by the Cockfosters Residents' Association [3], included anti-social behaviour, use of nearby gardens as toilet facilities, noise nuisance, damage to fields [4] and inconsiderate parking [3].

When residents of Mill Hill belatedly discovered that Barnet Council had agreed for the Festivals to be moved to the Copthall Playing Fields this year, many of them, particularly those living nearer the site, expressed serious concerns about the issues that Trent Park residents faced for many years.

Increasingly, members of the **Mill Hill Residents' Association (MHRA)** and the **Mill Hill Preservation Society (MHPS)** began to ask why they had not heard about the Festivals till very late and, more importantly, why no Barnet Council Officers had approached local residents to get some feedback, in advance of giving permissions.

Notice of the event was very sparse. There were reportedly just three notices placed around Copthall Fields in mid-April. However, no such notices were posted in any of the surrounding streets, where the most affected residents reside. Many residents felt that, at the very least, they would have wanted to have their concerns heard and addressed in advance of any permissions given.

Consequently, the **MHRA** and **MHPS** decided to create and distribute a joint survey for their members to establish the impact, if any, that the Festival had on the residents.

By approaching our respective members, some of whom might be local to the Copthall site, and asking them for their feedback, we felt that we would be in a better position to constructively engage with our local Mill Hill Councillors and with Barnet Council to discuss any future permissions for similar Festivals, or any other major events being considered in Mill Hill.

3. THE SURVEY

The on-line survey was issued by email to the members of MHPS and MHRA and posted across a number of local Facebook groups a few days before the Festival began. It ran for a few weeks after the event. We asked for postcodes or road names but not the full address details i.e. house number.

The findings below are based on the 107 online responses received, a number of emails and other conversations held with residents, and by opinions expressed by committee members of both the MHRA and the MHPS.

Specific Questions Asked

Four main questions were asked in the Survey to the local residents.

Did the 51st State Festival inconvenience you?

If YES, please give more details. (For example, congestion, parking, noise, vandalism, antisocial behaviour, litter etc)

Were you inhibited or prevented from using any Copthall leisure or sports facilities, going for a walk etc? If YES, please provide details.

Are there any positive points you would like to make about the festival?

Based on your experiences with the festival, what are your thoughts about this festival being held in Copthall Playing Fields again next year?

4. KEY FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

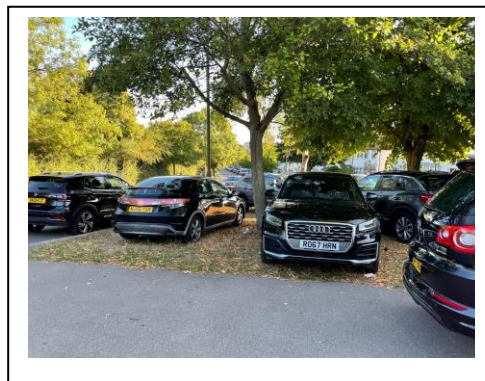
4.1 The results were fairly even in terms of positive and negative comments. However, from the feedback received it was fairly obvious that those living closest to the event were most inconvenienced by anti-social behaviour, while those living further afield reported less anti-social behaviour.

4.2 On that particular weekend, the wind must have been from the south-west (i.e. blowing towards the north-east) as people living in Millbrook Park and Mill Hill East areas complained most about noise, unlike those to the north or west. Three responses from Finchley Central and four from West Finchley, 2-3 miles away, complained about the noise. The bass components of the music were particularly invasive and some respondents said that they were unable to use their gardens. Some people living close to the site were disturbed by revellers leaving the event.

4.3 Parking was a big issue for those living in the area, particularly around Longfield Avenue and Page Street (see pictures). However some residents reported that the situation improved on the Sunday 21st when one or more of the roads was closed.



Pictures: Page Street on August 20 2022



4.4 Very few people knew about the Festival in advance but a number of them felt that the Council and our Mill Hill Councillors should have engaged with residents much sooner. A few claimed that they were not aware of the Festival until it started – see next section.

5. LACK OF EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH RESIDENTS

According to an email from Charlie Kanareck (Events and Marketing Manager, Barnet Parks & Leisure, dated 25 April 2022) Greenspaces at LBB had already agreed the permission for the event to take part on Cophall Playing Fields. From this, we understand that permission had already been granted during or before April 2022 – long before residents were informed.

It was only subsequent to permission already being granted by LBB, that a consultation was then launched with a deadline for objections set for 15 May 2022. The Licensing Sub-Committee was to meet on June 16th. According to an email from Elisabeth Hammond (Licensing Officer) this committee only deals with issues relating to music and sales of alcohol. As Festivals are all about music, and seeing that alcohol plays a large part too, the distinction between the two types of permission seems difficult to understand.

It was noted that onsite promotion for this consultation to local residents was extremely limited and only comprised three A4-sized notices posted on the fences at Copthall Fields dated 19 April. Residents asked why no additional notices were posted in any of the surrounding streets where the vast majority of affected residents reside. They stated that this felt like an attempt by LBB to keep it as quiet as possible and an attempt to avoid any input or feedback from residents.

We note that the consultation was posted on the Barnet Council web-site, but as very few people actively monitor this, some residents were wondering why this issue was not mentioned by Councillors on social media channels such as Facebook, especially when this is a recognised means of communication used by Mill Hill Councillors before elections.

A letter from the organisers of the 51st State Festival was apparently sent to some houses close to the site in June 2022, not requesting any feedback but merely informing them that the event was to take place. However, it was a very limited letter drop - many local residents stated that they did not receive this letter.

From the point of view of many of our respective members, this failure of both the Council and our elected Mill Hill Councillors to engage with and work proactively and collaboratively with local residents (directly and via the two main active resident associations) on this matter before any permissions were granted was a missed opportunity and not in keeping with the aims and objectives of the Barnet Plan 2021-2025.

6. SETTING UP & CLEARING UP

The June letter from the organisers, mentioned above, stated emphatically that work on the site would start no earlier than 8.00am and finish no later than 8.00pm, but some residents stated that crews were still working until 10pm, clanking and banging.

It was also reported that a week after the event there were a couple of IBC (Intermediate Bulk Container) tanks, some Heras fencing, and components from the marquees, abandoned in the field. Road signs erected along Greenlands Way also took several weeks to be collected. The damage noticed 10 days after the festivals was a broken drain cover, and some shallow grooves (in the playing fields) which may have been associated with cable runs.

7. INCOME FOR BARNET

It is understood that Barnet Council's finances benefit greatly from large music festivals.

We were particularly interested in the article [‘Desperate’ UK councils hiring out more parks to festivals, warns expert | Access to green space | The Guardian](#) that discusses income generated by festivals and specifically cites parks in London.

From our understanding of the survey and from feedback that we received, we did not feel that our respective members were opposed to LBB generating income from such events. On the contrary, the MHRA and the MHPS support the idea that certain events are able to boost the coffers to further local initiatives for the benefit of the community.

Some respondents asked if funds from such local events could be used for other Greenspaces projects, specifically in Mill Hill. The allocation of the funds should certainly be made transparent, i.e. visible to the public.

However, there was concern that financial benefit might risk clouding sound judgement regarding the protection of green space land, could increasingly risk loss of community facilities during and after the festival (see section 8) and generally create a situation where financial consideration might conflict with concerns of local residents.

8. LOSS OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES DURING AND AFTER THE FESTIVAL

It was reported to us that a number of local facilities and initiatives were negatively affected as a result of the two festivals.

The Copthall swimming pool was closed for the weekend of 20th and 21st August, Metro Golf users were present not on the grass course but only in the driving ranges, and people who regularly walk at Copthall were also discouraged by the noise from going there. The Metro Golf car park was requisitioned for the drop-off and collection (by taxis etc) of festival-goers.

Furthermore, several grassroots youth and amateur teams, that hire the fields at Copthall for their home ground, reported that they were negatively affected – both during that weekend and for a while after the events due to damage of the surfaces of the pitches. As a result, they had to cancel sessions or book fields elsewhere which caused a financial loss for them.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

There are bats regularly observed in Copthall Fields and these would have been disturbed by the noise, as would have any other wildlife such as hedgehogs and deer that are known to live there.

Fortunately, it had not rained for a long time and the ground was hard. Even so, there seem to have been furrows created and, had the ground been wet and soft, the damage caused by the heavy vehicles would have been much more extensive, as happened at Trent Park [4].

As the surrounding areas of Mill Hill, Hendon and Colindale get more and more intensively built up, Copthall is the nearest green space for many locals and it is a precious resource.

The presence of large-scale commercial events together with the flattening and paving over of fields for parking lots, has significantly degraded the Green Belt in Copthall and this will increase as more of these events are held.

10. THE FUTURE

We understand that permission has already been granted by Greenspaces to hold festivals for the next 5 years - once again without contacting residents to find out what issues they faced as a result of the 2022 festivals. The permissions [5] are for two periods (the three days Friday to Sunday plus a fourth day on Monday if a bank holiday is included) every summer up to September 2027, crucially with no upper limit on the number of attendees. With a week either side for set-up and dismantling, this could mean that Copthall Fields would be out of bounds for grass-roots activities during the whole of August.

The people who contributed to the survey were concerned that, over time, the maximum number of attendees is likely to increase, as it did in Trent Park (see section 2), all resulting in the expanding appropriation of public green spaces by commercial concerns.

11. CONCLUSION

While it could be argued that as a one-off occurrence, this festival had a fairly equal number of respondents expressing negative and positive views, it must be remembered that those that stand to be most affected, i.e. those living in the immediate vicinity, those living downwind, and grass-roots sports clubs at Copthall, need a stronger voice.

Their concerns need to be heard and addressed in advance of giving any further permissions for the future. Permission should only be granted one year at a time as people's views may change when festivals become larger or more frequent.

For this reason, and for all the reasons outlined in this report, we once again urge Mill Hill Councillors and relevant Council officers to work more proactively with residents and with both main resident groups in Mill Hill. We urge Councillors to see us as partners in these matters.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 Noise

At the Stakeholder's meeting [1], the noise consultant stated that the level should be 98 dB at the stage, that they were using directional amplifiers to limit sideways spread of noise, that the level should be 70-75 dB on the perimeter of the site and no more than 70 dB – the legal maximum - on the surrounding streets.

While these criteria may not reflect the real nuisance level, particularly for bass frequencies and for residents who live downwind, we understand that there is currently no publicly available data to show that the noise limits were adhered to.

Steps should be taken to reduce the noise decibels next year for the benefit of those affected, by making it mandatory for the Festival's organisers to use noise limiters and publish the noise data.

In addition, for future events, we urge the Council to organise objective monitoring of noise levels that can be independently verified.

12.2 Traffic and Parking

Traffic and parking was not satisfactorily managed at the 2022 festivals (see section 4.3). There needs to be a proper Transport Plan for each event and rigorous supervision by the Council. Events that attract 10,000 people trigger the Controlled Parking Zone and this needs to be monitored.

12.3 Communication, Transparency & Engagement

The Council's approval of the 51st State and Titan Festivals relates to the broader issue of transparency, resident participation, green spaces and how the Council wants to work with and support its residents.

We urge the Council and elected Members to communicate with and work with MHRA and MHPS in a more collaborative manner. We are currently the two largest and most active residents associations in Mill Hill and collectively we have very effective means of communication with large numbers of our members who are residents.

Working proactively together with us fits in with the Council's aspirations of democracy and of working with the community.

Furthermore, by partnering with us, we are able to engage directly with large numbers of residents on behalf of the Council and gather useful, constructive and valuable resident feedback that can be used by Councillors and other decision makers before decisions are made.

References

- [1] Stakeholders' Meeting held at Cophall Fields on 19th August 2022
- [2] [The Friends objections to the licensing of 51st State Festival in Trent Park - Friends of Trent Country Park](#) and [14. Annex 13 IP Representations.pdf \(enfield.gov.uk\)](#)
- [3] [CLARA-Report-on-2019-51st-State- -Elrow-Town-v3.pdf \(claracockfosters.org.uk\)](#)
- [4] [Enfield Council pledges to repair Trent Country Park after festival | Enfield Independent](#)
- [5] https://admin.barnet.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Licencingapplication080223_4.pdf