

Coram's Fields User Group

Independent Group representing local users,
parents and children in Coram's Fields

Intended for:

CFUG membership
Trustees and Management of Coram's Fields
Camden Council: Kings Cross and Holborn Wards
Sir Keir Starmer, MP for Holborn and St Pancras

Monday 23th March 2020

Dear Madam/Sir,

Please find enclosed our comments on the following document:

“Coram's Fields – Pitch usage policy, February 2020”.

We have looked carefully into this document. As you are aware, this has been an area of our particular concern over some time. We believe that continued intensive rental to adults is impacting the very nature of Coram's Fields.

We have previously provided our detailed comments in November 2018. The Pitch Usage Policy February 2020, as published, contains some minor improvements. However, a number of issues remain unresolved. In our opinion, a number of areas will require further clarification.

Particular issues that we would like to highlight here are:

- 1) Unacceptable compartmentalization of Children play;
- 2) Lack of clarity with regards to Adult rental;
- 3) Lack of access for Schools.

Local users represented by CFUG and Camden community at large were led to believe that adult rental was a temporary bridge to ensure financing for Coram's Fields until other financing sources are developed. The new post of paid fundraiser, now in its third year, was meant to alleviate the problem. However, instead of resolving the issue, it appears that Coram's Fields

management is now resolved on continued Adult rental! We note that the Management refuses to discuss the discontinuation of this unfortunate and damaging policy.

Intensive rental to adults interferes directly with the interests, safety and rights of children to Coram's Fields and is a failure of the general Trustee role at Coram's Fields.

In the meantime, we make the following specific comments on the Policy. We will be discussing these with you and Coram's Fields representatives as a matter of urgency:

I. TIME SLOTS FOR PLAY (PAGE 2, "FREE PLAY")

POLICY: *"Free play slots on sports pitches":*

- 5-16 years Weekdays 4 pm-5 pm (to 6 pm between May-September)
- 5-16 years Saturday 1pm-3pm
- 5-16 years Sunday 10 am-3 pm

CFUG: It is contrary to the needs of the children and youth users that free play in a children's park is limited to 3 pm on Saturday and Sunday's for example. Kids need to enjoy the freedom of coming and going and using the park until the normal closing time. Truly, such a clause is a disgraceful attack on the purpose of and spirit of Coram's Fields and its significance to children.

II. SCHOOLS (Page 2)

POLICY: *"Schools can book pitches anytime between 9 am-4 pm during term time with the exception of 12-2 pm."*

CFUG: Schools are prevented from using the pitches from 12-2 pm on Weekdays. The time 12-2 pm is a key time which most schools require for their sporting activity. Thus the Policy appears to continue to prioritise Adult hirers instead of schools (we deal separately below with Young hirers in the 20-25 category). We believe instead that Schools need to enjoy an absolute priority in Coram's.

We believe this element of Policy is wrong, and significantly devalues the "Free for schools" slogan. The Policy favours the adults hirers who can use the pitch during lunchtime (and currently dominate this time slot). We have long highlighted the need for Coram's Fields to work closely with Schools in order to maximise their use of the pitches.

III. ADULT HIRERS

Policy: *“Available for hire to adults at certain times during the week and at weekends.”*

CFUG: Adults do not belong in Coram’s Fields. It is the presence that must be carefully and closely regulated. It would appear, however, that the Policy focuses instead on compartmentalisation of children’s time in Coram’s. The Policy needs to clearly set out:

- A. Specific time slots available to Adults.
- B. Number of pitches available to Adults at any given hour.
- C. The percentage of key hours offered to Adults (weekends and afternoons).
- D. Rationale for offering rental to adults as opposed to offering hours to youth sports clubs and other youth organisations.

In our opinion, which we have stated clearly enough in our previous comments, Coram’s Fields should always favour use by youth sports clubs/organisations and/or Schools.

IV. RENTAL BY 20-25-YEAR-OLDS

Policy: *“Booking and subsidised rates – 20-25 years”*

CFUG: We appreciate the sentiment here. But this group is very diverse. It would not be right, for example, that young lawyers are subsidised by Coram’s Fields and that these young professionals compete for the SAME time slots as 16-19-year-olds.

We note that the Weekday slots 12-2 pm are apparently intended for 20-25-year-olds. From observation throughout last years, we know that these slots are utilised by adults in local companies (company football league). Therefore the system appears to be an invitation for misinterpretation and abuse of purpose (including potential manipulation through block bookings).

V. BOOKING BY YOUNG PEOPLE (16-19)

Policy: *“We also reserve a number of slots for these young people (16-19) to book pitches in advance. There is no cost to booking and slots are available at the times below.”*

CFUG: We would require close scrutiny of the actual slots available and how are 16-19-year-olds treated in relation to 20-25-year-olds in the booking process. We would like to ask Coram’s Fields to provide us with the **actual** times and number of slots available.

We do not see it as appropriate that the two groups should be competing for the same slots, where the younger group is bound to lose out as less organised. Instead, the slots bookable by 16-19-year-olds, if not booked by them should remain available for free play.

VI. OTHER

1. It is an unfortunate misrepresentation to state that Coram’s Fields Charity was in existence since 1936 (Page 1, Sentence 1).
2. The following statement *“A commitment that overall no less than 65% of the total hours is available to children”*, is meaningless and potentially deceptive (Page 1, Para 7).

The Policy ought to differentiate key hours when children are not in schools. The Policy ought to provide the number of hours pitches are used by Schools.

Conversely, since Adults are currently allowed at certain times the Policy ought to state precisely: *“Adults may be allowed at up to 10% of the time, at the time of low usage, if children, schools, clubs.....”*

3. Coram’s Fields Pitches are not an asset to be financially managed (*“the highest possible financial returns”* (Page 4, para 5).

This, in our opinion, is an unfortunate and a deeply misguided view of Coram’s Fields. The pitches are an integral part of Coram’s Fields park which in its entirety belongs to and is run for the benefit and free use by Children.