

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 16 May 2024

Use of West Princes Street Gardens and the Ross Bandstand

Executive/routine
Wards

Executive
11 – City Centre

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Culture and Communities Committee:
- 1.1.1 Approve the revised schedule for West Princes Street Gardens, as set out in paragraph 4.13, including the opportunity to create an August ‘festival’ programme for the Ross Bandstand, and two procured annual events in May and September;
 - 1.1.2 Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place in consultation with Group Spokespeople and Group Leaders to finalise plans for an August programme in 2024 if this is possible;
 - 1.1.3 Note that officers are progressing with proposals for a mandatory major event ticket levy to support a Princes Street Gardens Development Fund, with these due to be reported to Finance and Resources Committee in August 2024; and
 - 1.1.4 Note that officers are beginning to early feasibility of improvements to West Princes Street Gardens, including the Ross Bandstand, and will keep Committee updated on progress.

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Use of West Princes Street Gardens and the Ross Bandstand

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 On 13 October 2022, Committee [approved](#) revised [terms and parameters](#) for operating events in West Princes Street Gardens, as well as the proposed number of major events which can take place. The decision in October 2022 aimed to clarify conditions for an evolving events sector, increase our environmental protection measures and address the closure of the entrance to West Princes Street Gardens at King's Stables Road due to rockfall.
- 2.2 This report provides an update on how the process has been managed in the period since and seeks approval for changes to the decision-making process.
- 2.3 Committee is asked to recognise that, until a solution is found to the rockfall from the Castle, there remains a need to control and limit access on grounds of health and safety, as well as reducing the environmental risks to the St Cuthbert's Churchyard entrance to the Gardens. However, a more flexible approach to major event definitions and the process can increase use by smaller scale event operators and community groups.
- 2.4 The report also sets out a proposal to begin the process to develop plans for the future development of the Ross Bandstand

3. Background

- 3.1 The Ross Bandstand and West Princes Street Gardens have hosted events of all shapes and sizes for many years. In addition to its primary function as a world class public park and greenspace, it is also a key city centre event space. Having the Ross Bandstand, a historic event amphitheatre used for decades, situated at the heart of the Gardens adds to the sense that the Gardens have a unique role in the city's cultural life.
- 3.2 As acknowledged in the Edinburgh Events Parks Manifesto 2014, the city's festivals and events offering is key to its image at home and abroad, and to its capital city

status. Hogmanay and Edinburgh's Festivals, as well a range of other event organisers, provide year-round activities for the public.

- 3.3 Rockfall from the Castle has resulted in St Cuthbert's Churchyard being the only option for access and egress of major event infrastructure, resulting in additional environmental and access pressures on use of the Gardens and historic Churchyard.
- 3.4 Events in West Princes Street Gardens provide revenue to the Council which have been previously been built into the Council's revenue budget.
- 3.5 On 13 October 2022, Committee [approved](#) revised [terms and parameters](#) for operating events in West Princes Street Gardens, as well as the proposed number of major events which can take place. The four major events were:
 - 3.5.1 Edinburgh's Hogmanay celebration;
 - 3.5.2 The Edinburgh International Festival (EIF) opening or closing concert; and
 - 3.5.3 Two other event days to be decided by the Executive Director of Place in consultation with group spokespeople.
- 3.6 Since October 2022, these arrangements have been implemented with updates to Committee through the Business Bulletin and Spokesperson briefings.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The events and festival sector is constantly evolving.
- 4.2 The Hogmanay and Festival events were considered as fixed commitments, with the remaining two days (as described above at 3.5) advertised as an open submission in each of the subsequent years. The Hogmanay event is subject to a separate contract.
- 4.3 For the remaining two days (see 3.5.3) one submission was received in 2022 from Fly Music for a two-day youth orientated electronic music festival. In 2023, two applications were received with Fly Music again being awarded the two events days.

Event Days

- 4.4 As the response to open advertising has been limited, officers have considered how greater interest could be secured and propose a change to the process for the remaining two days whereby a three-year contract for one major event could be advertised. As well as increasing interest in the opportunity, this would enable the successful applicant to develop and forward plan a programme offer rather than being limited to annual programming which cannot be planned in detail until all notes of interest are assessed. The contract would be awarded based on the Council's approved list of fees and charges and terms and conditions.

Major Events

- 4.5 The EIF have decided not to use the 2024 major event slot, choosing to host an event elsewhere in the city. They have also confirmed that they would be content to release its hold for the next two years.
- 4.6 This provides an opportunity to reshape the major events calendar to allow the Ross Bandstand and wider Gardens to be animated sensitively and flexibly during the summer with low impact activities as described below.
- 4.7 Officers have been approached by Watchtower Group (also responsible for the Fly Music event) with a proposal to develop a Ross Bandstand stage from April through to September (live events, food and beverage outlets, etc).
- 4.8 This proposal did not include paying the Council's approved list of fees and charges as this would be economically unviable (for any promoter looking for a longer term let) but was seeking a partnership arrangement to pilot extended use of the Ross Bandstand.
- 4.9 Officers feel that this would place too much of an operating pressure on the wider Gardens over an extended period, but that an August only period of let could support the city's cultural offer and which could be curated at a negotiated rate. If Committee agree this proposal, criteria and parameters of acceptable use will be developed and shared with the Festival and Events All Party Oversight Group (APOG).
- 4.10 With EIF releasing its August slot for the next two years, a festival stage concept could be programmed, on the proviso that any new festival stage could accommodate an EIF event proposal. Officers will continue to engage with EIF on its future programming of West Princes Street Gardens to maintain the Council's support of its citywide programming.
- 4.11 A trial event may be possible for 2024 by engaging with a range of partners, however, it may not be possible to have a fully developed offering in place until 2025.
- 4.12 If an event is possible in August 2024, Committee are asked to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place in consultation with Group Spokespeople and Group Leaders to take a decision on how to proceed once interest is understood.

Revised Schedule for West Princes Street Gardens

- 4.13 Based on the above, a revised schedule for West Princes Street Gardens would be as follows:
 - 4.13.1 May - Community/Family orientated event – on the basis of a three-year contract award, for an annual two day "large event" (10 days maximum on site);
 - 4.13.2 Summer Festivals - ongoing arrangement, to include all summer festivals creating a low impact animation up to eight weeks in total, including two days of "large event(s)" (10 days maximum on site);

4.13.3 September - Youth orientated event - on the basis of a three-year contract award, for an annual two day "large event" (10 days maximum on site); and

4.13.4 Edinburgh's Winter Festivals - as per separate contract.

- 4.14 For the majority of the events described above, public access to the Gardens is maintained during the daytime. Such events do require access and egress for production equipment and staging so there will be periods where access to some areas is restricted for health and safety reasons, although much of the Gardens do remain open. This is managed through the Event Planning and Operations Group (EPOG) process and communicated to the public through Council and event organiser social media channels.
- 4.15 Before going ahead, all events will be required to complete the existing and standard processes to confirm the booking to the Council's satisfaction (including completion of a Public Spaces Application Form), fulfilling all licensing and contractual obligations, as well as engaging with conditions set out by the Council's EPOG process. Capacities for major events will be decided through this process and at the sole discretion of the Council.
- 4.16 On 21 March 2024, Council approved a motion to investigate how a levy could be applied on major events to create a Princes Street Gardens Development Fund. Officers are currently developing proposals for a mandatory ticket levy to be applied to all major events where a charge is made for access. A report on this will be presented to Finance and Resources Committee in August 2024, following consultation with event organisers. Until then, a voluntary levy will be encouraged.
- 4.17 Other events taking place within the curtilage of the Ross Bandstand and immediate existing hardstanding infrastructure are not subject to any restriction on event numbers. The capacity of the Bandstand is 2,700 (subject to production plans). Such events are booked via the Council's public spaces process.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Officers will continue to engage with Historic Environment Scotland to resolve the issue of rockfall from the Castle rock and seek remedial solutions to enable the use of the King's Stables Road entrance.
- 5.2 If the revised major events programme is approved, officers will begin to curate an August/Festival stage at the Ross Bandstand.
- 5.3 Committee will be aware that there were previously plans to redevelop the Ross Bandstand and wider West Princes Street Gardens. Officers will undertake early planning and feasibility over future uses and designs for West Princes Street Gardens, including the Ross Bandstand. Councillors will be kept updated as progress is made.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The income from events which is built in to the Council budget but which is not possible to realise at present is being managed as a pressure in the Place directorate budget.
- 6.2 There is potential to recover some income through increased use of the Ross Bandstand for additional, smaller scale events.
- 6.3 Investment in business case and design planning will support an improved future financial model for the Ross Bandstand.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 There are no immediate impacts, but future planning will address public sector equality duty, specific equality duties, the Equality and Diversity Framework, the End Poverty Edinburgh Plan, and how our proposed intentions to shift the culture of the organisation to better embed equality will be addressed.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 As a public body, the Council has statutory duties relating to climate emissions and biodiversity. The Council

“must, in exercising its functions, act in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of emissions reduction targets”

(Climate Change (Emissions Reductions Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019), and

“in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions”

(Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004)

- 8.2 The City of Edinburgh Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and committed to work towards a target of net zero emissions by 2030 for both city and corporate emissions and embedded this as a core priority of the Council Business Plan 2023-27. The Council also declared a Nature Emergency in 2023.

Environmental Impacts

- 8.3 There are no immediate impacts based on the information in this report. The future plans, including any subsequent brief for the design solution for the Ross Bandstand will address how the Council’s net zero ambitions can be achieved through a more focused offer, including being built to Passivhaus standards.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 The work to date has engaged with a wide range of Council officers, with a team established to progress the necessary actions as set out in this report.
- 9.2 The potential reputational risk associated with the use of West Princes Street Gardens and the Ross Bandstand will be managed via the established Public Spaces protocols.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 None.

11. Appendices

- None.