

Friends of the Meadows have their say on council proposals

✘ The Culture and Sport Committee meets this morning to debate the possibility of establishing a public park events space in one of their parks. The parks where they are considering whether to install what they describe as a reinforced events space (we believe that may mean tarmac) include Calton Hill, West Princes Street Gardens, East Princes Street Gardens, Lauriston Castle, Leith Links, Inverleith Park and The Meadows.

The papers are [here](#) and the item number is 7.8.

Friends of Meadows and Bruntsfield Links have asked to make a deputation to the committee and this will be delivered by their convener shortly after 10:00am when the meeting is scheduled to get underway.

They have shared what they will say to the meeting with us and we publish it here (subject always to the proviso that it may be delivered differently on the day)

You can watch the proceedings live [here](#).

My name is Heather Goodare, and I am Convener of Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links. We are now a registered charity. The first I heard of this proposal for a Public Park Events Space in the Meadows was when I was telephoned last Thursday by a reporter from the Evening News. There was an article about it in the News on Friday, together with an editorial, and on Saturday seven printed letters objecting to it, with none in favour.

I don't recall any specific consultation with our organisation about this proposal, nor with the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links Advisory Group, and I think this was most regrettable. I see that the general public has been consulted in a general way, according to your report, para. 3.4, but the paper before you details only 70 suggestions as to where such a site should be located: what were the other 167 missing opinions on where such a space might go? We are not told. Also, we have here proposals for a surface that is hard and permanent, which may go well beyond what the public understood by an events site such as is there at the moment. To quote the Edinburgh Parks Events Manifesto 2014, 'it is important that the integrity of the park is not compromised by over or improper use.'

I should like to put forward some further points for your consideration.

1. We see that 'ongoing maintenance of recently installed drainage is viewed as the most suitable option for The Meadows' (para 3.14). We agree. We were pleasantly surprised to see that the grass recovered reasonably quickly after the recent Festival event, even though the Underbelly were allowed to stay five extra days over the usual ration of 28 days. We see no reason whatever why there should be any need to consider any more permanent surface, which would surely be inappropriate for sporting activities. Also, we need to keep an eye on this site during the coming year to see how it fares, before any proposal for a change is seriously considered.

2. The huge cost of alternative strategies, up to £2 million, plus maintenance costs of £30,000 a year, would seem to be a conclusive deterrent at a time of financial stringency. Also, the current bidding process for events seems to have generated a reasonable income, though it might well have been more, when one compares it with, say, Bristo Square. It is very doubtful if a harder surface would

actually attract more revenue. It could not possibly recompense the Council for any outlay on reinforced fibre or net systems. I am assuming that events would only take place in the summer.

3. As the report states, 'Changing the surface from grass to a reinforced surface would constitute development, and will therefore require planning permission. Given the nature of the works, the proposals would fall outwith the Permitted Development Rights for Local Authorities'. This is common good land, and should not be built on, even if only with a hard surface such as this. Friends of the Meadows will endeavour to make sure that the law is obeyed in this regard.

4. Ideally, of course, we would ask that the Meadows is treated like all the other Edinburgh parks except for Princes Street Gardens, and that events take no longer than 15 days. In fact the Funfair that ran alongside the Underbelly this year only lasted a fortnight, and afterwards the grass recovered quickly. It is our view that any events lasting longer than 15 days should be located on genuinely hard standing sites. We suggest that if further sites are required, brownfield areas around the centre of the city should be investigated. These would need no or very little reinstatement after events. The Ladyboys seem to have managed well this year on such a site. This would seem to be a sensible use for vacant sites.

The Meadows is a wonderful green space that we should treasure, and damage as little as possible. Yes, events on the Meadows are fun, but should respect the terrain, and not spoil it for local citizens who use it all the year round.

Heather Goodare

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