

Council will consider plans to manage the city during the festivals when they meet next week

After considerable and detailed discussion of ideas for a new management plan for the Festival City next summer councillors on the culture committee agreed to refer the outline plans to the full council which meets next week.

There was considerable concern raised by members of the public during and after the Festival period around the concerts held in the gardens, pedestrian safety and especially for us residents what are called 'liveability issues'. So this will add to the agenda for next week's full council meeting and we expect some lively debate then.

We all know how hard it is to get around in the summer even on foot, and the council proposes to take some summer only measures to alleviate some or all of the difficulties. These would include things like traffic management with the possibility of not only making it more attractive but also closing George Street between Charlotte Square and Hanover Street. The council also want to invoke a Coach Parking Strategy for the summer.

The overarching desire is to make it easier for residents to go about their 'daily business' whilst ensuring public safety and that the festival has something for everyone.

The council also wants to enter into a contract in 2019 with Summer Sessions to hold concerts in the gardens once more subject to retaining an improved access for the public to the gardens. This has been put on hold until the full council approves the report before the committee this morning.

All of this comes from an initial decision in January this year when the council agreed to keep examining the festivals and the management of the city in this context. There will be a further report made to the Culture committee when it next meets in January.

Now that the discussion over what should be done to improve matters during the Festival will be considered by all 63 councillors next Thursday, Conservative councillor Joanna Mowat will also be able to have her say about the report.

Cllr Mowat represents the city centre ward and raised concerns at the August GRBV meeting about the [hoardings](#) erected at Princes St Gardens while the Summer Sessions concerts were being held. She claimed that the hoardings changed Princes St Gardens into a private space during the busiest time of the year. She also demanded to know the way that the contract with Summer Sessions was entered into and what conditions were imposed on the use of these hoardings. The report brought forward today was in part a response to her raising the matter in August.

Summer Sessions and the Hoardings

The matter of the hoardings also involved the Council Leader Cllr Adam McVey who called in the various parties to talk about it. He engineered a solution where the gardens were not shut for just as long, and the hoardings were then taken down and put back up before each concert to minimise the loss of the iconic view from Princes St to the gardens below and up to the Castle.

WHAT HAPPENED THIS MORNING?

A 'rebel group' of Conservative councillors demanded that the report *Managing our Festival City* should be referred for consideration by all councillors.

On the sayso of the three Tory members and LibDem councillor Hal Osler, it appears that any progress with these important considerations, including a proposed site visit by councillors, will be delayed by a further week.

The criterion for such a motion being approved at committee level is that a quarter of those councillors at the meeting should vote in favour of it. Since Councillor David Key had been called away urgently at the beginning of the meeting, it was made just a little easier for the Tories to pull this move off.

I asked directly if this was a political move on the part of Cllr Phil Doggart and his colleagues, but he refuted my suggestion, saying laughingly that was just a bit too cynical. He said : "I do want a full discussion of this matter though, and I want to ensure that the councillor who presented the motion to the GRBV committee in August, has the opportunity to present their argument around it. I think that is important.

"I also asked specifically when the council would sign any contract with Summer Sessions (the answer given by officers was as soon as possible) so delaying a week is not going to have any impact given that the contract will not be signed until the summer anyway."

We spoke to Councillor Mowat who agreed she was also happy with the referral.

She said : "I am very pleased this is coming to Full Council. It seems most odd to me that in a report which highlights the pressures put on the city by the number of visitors, to continue to attract 27,000 additional visitors. Common sense might dictate that the additional visitors are attracted at a different time of year or to a different part of the city."

I asked the Culture Convener, Cllr Wilson whether he was bothered by the delay this will cause. He replied : "This is a broad report looking at the immediate obvious issues which we have, but this is not going to be the only report, nor indeed is it the only report that we will have to address these matters going forward."

So are they both happy?

Cllr Wilson agreed with Cllr Doggart that there is not a significant delay being caused here, and he admitted that it does give the opportunity for Cllr Mowat to have her say as she was the proposer of that aspect of the report. He said : "It is quite right that Cllr Mowat has an opportunity to speak so I am not unhappy about it."

Cllr Doggart also said : "This referral also allows officers to frame the report that goes to Transport and Environment Committee (TEC) having heard the comments from councillors this morning from all across the city. On the committee we have Councillor Doran who represents the City Centre and she has her concerns, but I am sure that all 63 of us probably have our own concerns around safety in the city. So I think it is useful to understand the transport implications, especially for wards like mine where people are going to be using the bus. They will want to know about any changes to buses, and we can feed those in to any changes as a whole."



Culture Convener Donald Wilson addressing the invited audience at St Bride's

The Convener is very confident that there will be some meaningful suggestions for improvement in the city before we reach the festival period next summer.

Cllr Wilson said : "We get asked about this a lot. We all know what the issues are and people ask what are we going to do about it. This is an initial attempt do something about it. It is a big issue, the management of the festival city, and how we can do that better."

And of course at the full council meeting next week we would fully expect the matter of Transient Visitor Levy (a way of collecting extra income from tourists to pay for looking after certain things like the cleanliness of the city) will no doubt raise its head.

There is no record of how much Summer Sessions paid to the council for the privilege of bringing acts such as Paloma Faith, Rag 'n Bone Man, Tom Jones and Kasabian to Princes

Street Gardens. It is a matter of commercial confidentiality and council papers show only a nominal £1, if asked only, on the lease. Meantime The Scottish Chamber Orchestra paid £6,800 for the period from 22-29 August for the fireworks concert, and Bungydome UK Limited paid £15,680 for the period from 27 June to 27 August for the lead of a part of West Prince St Gardens for their Bubbleparc event.

You can read about all of the outline plans in the council report [here](#).



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