

Planning for Edinburgh's Christmas

For over twenty years planning permission has been sought and granted in Edinburgh for the Big Wheel and other Christmas related structures which have all been part of Edinburgh's Christmas.

On one occasion in 2010 the necessary permission was granted in retrospect. It is more usual for permission and building warrants to be granted before any building works begin. But in the case of the structures needed for Edinburgh's Christmas no planning permission appears to have been applied for as yet.

And work has begun. The Twitterati have been talking about it all week.



Cliff Hague Chair of the Cockburn Association, the civic organisation which has as its focus the protection and enhancement of the city, began asking questions earlier today on social media. This resulted in Mr Hague asking whether work should now stop as he discovered that no permission has been granted.

Here is what Cliff Hague tweeted earlier :

1/3 EAST PRINCES STREET GARDENS BREAKING NEWS: We have had confirmation that Planning Permission is required and no Planning Application has been received to date.
pic.twitter.com/QH0rVBBHKU

– Cockburn Association (@thecockburn) [October 25, 2019](#)

We have tried to contact Mr Hague but have not reached him for

comment as yet.

Light Night which begins our Christmas season in Edinburgh takes place on 17 November this year. The gardens site is an important part of that, and the council regard Edinburgh's Christmas as an important festival, particularly for locals who support it. We have been told that the area over which the market will extend is smaller than it was in square footage than last year.

We wrote [earlier this week](#) : "The survey carried out after Christmas last year shows that most people who visited Edinburgh's Christmas would recommend the event to others. The organisers reported on positive figures for both of our festive season events, and the council told us in June 2019 they were extending their arrangements with Underbelly."

The contract was extended for two years until March 2022, although the initial contract allowed for an extension of three years until 2022/23. The shortened time was negotiated under powers delegated to the Executive Director of Place. An emergency motion was brought to the June meeting of the Culture Committee asking for permission to extend the Underbelly contract in part to recompense them for the additional cost that they will bear this year. Part of the motion (which is included below) states that there is significant additional cost to holding the Christmas Market owing to the improvements made by National Galleries of Scotland and the need to protect these.

Underbelly have undertaken that financial risk by getting their engineers in concert with those representing the National Galleries to design a scaffolding structure which will offer protection to the banking in the garden.

Planning permission is important. It ensures that structures (usually buildings) are built to a certain specification. It also runs alongside a Building Warrant which ensures that

council officers have oversight of any building operations in the city. It is also a matter of Health and Safety and ultimately Underbelly will require a certificate to open the site to the public.

Underbelly who organise Edinburgh's Christmas on behalf of the council do know that this is required.

A spokesperson for the company said tonight : "Underbelly agreed with the Council that it was not possible to make a planning application until the plans had been agreed with the Council as the landlord of Edinburgh's Christmas. Discussions about the plans began with the Council in April and were not agreed until October 12. Following that agreement, Underbelly is now compiling its planning application which it will submit at the earliest possible opportunity.

"The scaffold currently going in allows the Christmas market to continue in the gardens while working round the ongoing changes to the landscape and also ensures we are taking every measure to protect the gardens."

We understand that a statement or briefing will be made by the council at the beginning of the week following an examination of the whole matter.

There have been works in the gardens all year – the National Galleries of Scotland have felled trees and constructed paths there to allow changes to the ground and basement floors of the National Gallery of Scotland. Former office, storage and display spaces will be altered to allow you to enter the galleries directly from the gardens.

Will all of the adverse comment on social media lead to the cancellation of Edinburgh's Christmas? Only a Grinch would want that right?

Emergency Motion by the Coalition

Culture and Communities Committee

18 June 2019

Emergency Motion – Winter Festivals

Committee:

Notes the ongoing success of Edinburgh's Winter Festivals as measured against the performance criteria set out by the council;

Notes that in order to safeguard the improvements to East Princes Street Gardens being delivered by the National Galleries of Scotland as part of the wider Gallery refurbishment programme, there is a significant additional cost to holding the Christmas Market there;

Notes that officers entered into discussion with Underbelly, the winter festivals contractor, to assess how best to meet that additional cost;

Notes that officers and Underbelly reached a conditional agreement to extend Underbelly's contract for two of the optional three years extension, to enable Underbelly to meet this additional cost;

Notes that officers have informed Underbelly that the contract in its current form will not be extended into the third year of the possible extension, and that instead, the approach to delivering events for Christmas and Hogmanay will be reviewed through a process of public and stakeholder consultation and subsequent procurement or commissioning, for introduction from 2022;

Notes that owing to time constraints, and in accordance with the contractual decision previously made by the Council, officers made this decision under delegated authority but Councillors on the Culture and Communities Committee and other interested Councillors were briefed on the decision.

Moved by Councillor Donald Wilson

Seconded by Councillor Amy McNeese-Mechan

