

Edinburgh's Hogmanay – The Loony Dook 2020 – sold out or sell out?

This year 1100 tickets were sold for The Loony Dook and event organisers Underbelly announced the event was at capacity and no more entries were allowed.

The Sold Out sign went up on the Edinburgh's Hogmanay website causing some on social media to exclaim that the organisers could not keep people out of the water.

Here is just one example :

Edinburgh's Hogmanay organisers were actually charging people to go in the sea for the annual Loony Dook. The sea. Where it's free all year round. Does [@FollowTheCow](#) own the sea now....? [#Edinburgh](#) <https://t.co/3LLNbv4Akg>

– Chris (@chrisprestige) [January 2, 2020](#)

A spokesperson for Underbelly said : “The Loony Dook has grown in popularity since it began back in 1987. As it grew more infrastructure was required and Edinburgh's Hogmanay was asked to become involved to make it a safe and fun event on a

continuing basis.

“In 2011 a fee was charged for the first time, and the fee now has been unchanged since 2016. We continue to collaborate with the founders to make it the best possible event for the local community.

“The Dook itself is now just one aspect alongside a fancy dress competition, a parade and the band. Each ticket bought includes a donation to the RNLI, the dookers and spectators are looked after and kept safe, and it remains incredibly popular. There are of course many beaches up and down the Forth and nearby coastlines and plenty choice for those who wish to dook for free.”

Councillor Susan Rae spoke out against what she and others see as the commercialisation of the event :

I don't know what's worse? Charging people £12 to get in the sea, or people handing over £12 to get in the sea. How can you 'ticket' the damned Forth! <https://t.co/G4N7KVMXK2>

– Susan Rae (@susan4leithwalk) [December 31, 2019](#)

We asked someone who has taken part in the Loony Dook a couple of times – and who took part this year too – about her experience. She said : “Whilst I can understand a dislike of commercialisation of a traditional local event, it was necessary for public safety.

“Underbelly have tried to ensure the spirit of the event has been maintained.

“As a local resident, and someone who has taken part twice (both this year, as well as 15 years ago, prior to Underbelly involvement), I think the Loony Dook is a great local event. The cost of the ticket is minimal when considering the number

of staff required to run the event safely, the clean up process, and the t-shirt we all received as a memento. I thoroughly enjoyed being a part of this event and would encourage other locals to support the continuation of this Ferry tradition.”



The Loony Dook 1 January 2020 PHOTO Live Edinburgh News

The Edinburgh Reporter got in touch with local councillor Norman Work and asked for his views. He represents local residents all year round, and has also taken part in the Loony Dook himself.

Cllr Work said : “I went down to have a look and not participate although I have done the Loony Dook in the past. I did it when it was locally organised and also when it was organised by Unique Events who were first to take it on in

around 2010.

“When Unique first organised the event they charged £6, it rose to £10 in 2016 so for Underbelly to charge £12 now is not, in my view, excessive. Apparently Unique Events made a loss initially and had to get additional sponsors so Stoats got involved as a sponsor.

“When the Loony Dook first started 33 years ago it was a dozen guys having a laugh, they carried on doing it and by the 1990s others started to join in.

“When I first took part in 2008 you were meant to register and met up at the former pub called the Moorings. There were no safety measures in place and no proper road closures. As the event got bigger police had concerns about public safety and pressure was put on the guys who organised it to ensure it went smoothly.

“I got involved when it was starting to get really popular. Participants were asked to register and put money in a bucket which then went to a local charity but not everyone registered and there were concerns about where the money collected went to. So there were a lot of issues.

“It got too much for the local guys organising the event and they asked for help without much success. This then led to them asking for Edinburgh to take over and adding it to the official Hogmanay Celebrations.

“Unique took on the event and to comply with all the safety issues they charged a fee to cover cost which was £6. The local RNLI who were involved with the original Loony Dook managed to get them to agree to donate a percentage of ticket sales to the RNLI if they could use their boathouse for registration. Unique also changed the start location to the Hawes Promenade.

“Given road closures, notices, cones and all that goes with

holding an event and also taking into consideration the narrow High Street and the narrow steps that you enter the water by, there are a lot of safety issues that have to be addressed, including limiting the numbers to 1000, hence the sold out notice.

“It is easy to add up the sums. If tickets sell for £12 and at least £1 is given to RNLI then ticket sales would generate £11K but once all the costs involved are deducted I don't think Underbelly make much out of the event.

“Yes it has changed, but it is better organised. It is far safer as the Boathouse steps, which are used to get into and out of the water, are easier to use. It used to be a free for all and you struggled to get up the steps due to the crowds.

“As for having a good time, yes, the local pubs were busy, the cafés as well. The chippies were busy and the place was buzzing. The event attracts an estimate 4000 people, many spend money in the pubs and cafés so businesses really benefit. It also puts Queensferry on the world stage.

“Due to the geography of Queensferry there have to be Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders which cost money, so it would be difficult to hold the event unless a sponsor got involved to pay for the costs involved.

“I know people on social media have mentioned Portobello which is free but that's held on a wide sandy beach which is safe for both participants and visitors. The beach is accessed by a wide promenade. No roads to close and no real public safety concerns so it is not really comparable.”

Also, backing this view, Councillor Gavin Barrie tweeted :

There is a common misconception about this. The locals who ran the Queensferry loony dook were overwhelmed by the numbers seeking to take part and there were serious concerns about safety and facilities. They asked for help. It now

raises money for charity and is managed safely.

– Gavin K Barrie (@GavinKBarrie) [January 2, 2020](#)

From the entry fees paid for the Loony Dook and other Edinburgh's Hogmanay events, £42,500 was raised to support three charities – OneCity Trust, The Brain Tumour Charity and RNLI. The Brain Tumour Charity is one which is particularly close to Underbelly director Ed Bartlam's family as his 7 year-old son was diagnosed with a brain tumour and he sadly died in August 2019. Underbelly also raise funds for charity through their Fringe events held here in the summer.