

Opinion – Cllr Ashley Graczyk calls for protection for Princes Street Gardens

by Independent councillor Ashley Graczyk who represents Sighthill-Gorgie Ward. Here she calls for improved environmental protections for Princes Street Gardens.

Underbelly, who organise Edinburgh's Christmas for the council, announced this week that all events will take place in a [virtual format](#).



Cllr Ashley Graczyk

Local residents have raised concerns about environmental protections in place for Prince Street Gardens despite the winter festival organisers scaling back plans for a proposed event in 2021.

Edinburgh's Christmas festivals have been cancelled for 2020 due to the continuing coronavirus crisis. However, organisers Underbelly have submitted a joint application covering a possible event this year and a planned event in 2021-2022. The application covers a reduced footprint for the event, widely

criticised in 2019 for the 'space-deck' which occupied a large part of the lower gardens and ravaged the grass, taking the gardens out of commission for a number of months.

I believe the plans are still flawed. There has been a huge public outcry following the mistreatment of Princes Street Gardens during and beyond the winter festivals last year. The gardens provide an important escape for local residents and workers. As common good park land, their primary purpose is to provide a peaceful green space in an urban environment.

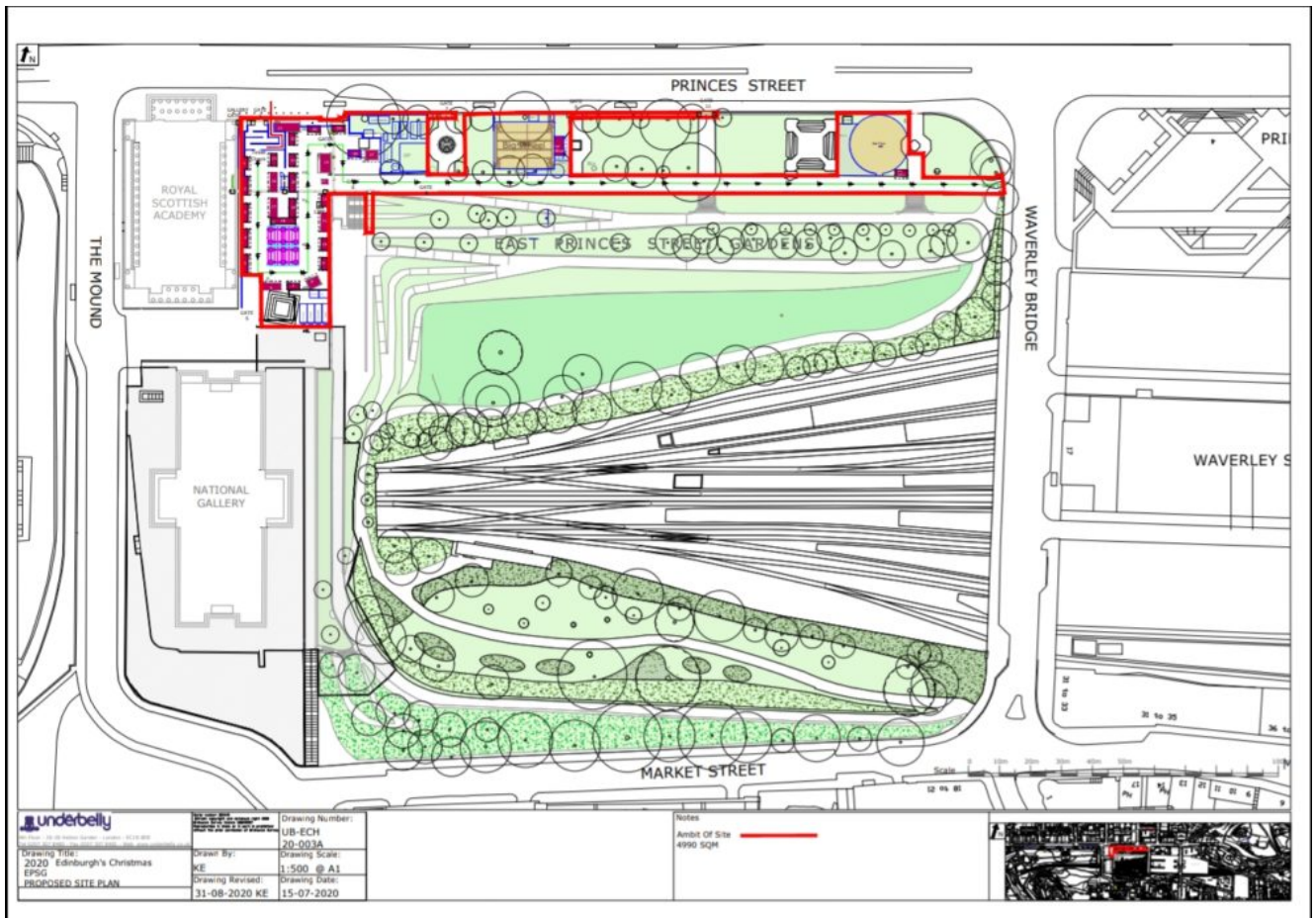


East Princes Street Gardens at the end of October 2019 Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

As a premier park and important cultural heritage site, we must ensure the very highest standards of protection are in place for such a precious natural asset. I am calling for an Environmental Impact Assessment for this event to ensure that this much-loved green space is properly looked after. Unfortunately, we have seen the damage that can be caused to parkland and trees by such commercial events in the past and we must be very careful to ensure this does not happen again.

A further concern for me is the 'unnecessary' restriction on public access to the gardens. From the current plans, it appears that the contractors want to completely remove access to and through the gardens from Princes Street itself. Most concerningly, they want to remove disabled access from all but those prepared to buy tickets, by barricading the public walkway. We have recently spent public funds improving access to the gardens for disabled people. This closure is totally unnecessary, and a limited ticketed zone can easily be created while maintaining public access to the lower gardens for the near three month duration of the event.

Public comments are open on The City of Edinburgh Council planning portal until 9 October 2020.



There are three links to three separate applications. It was our fellow independent news website, [The Broughton Spurtle](http://www.broughtonspurtle.com), who first revealed in November 2019 that Underbelly did not have any permission for Edinburgh's Christmas in previous years.

<http://ter.ooo/Underbelly1>

<http://ter.ooo/Underbelly2>

<http://ter.ooo/Underbelly3>