

Council grants parts of the planning permission for next year's Christmas events

The council's planning committee has approved some arrangements for the events organised by Underbelly in the city centre including Princes Street Gardens at Christmas 2021.

All events this December have already been cancelled and Christmas has effectively been moved online.

Christmas 2021 will include the Star Flyer and the Festive Wheel which will be located in Princes Street Gardens on either side of the Scott Monument, despite some public opposition to these attractions.



Yeti and Star Flyer. Photo: Martin P. McAdam
www.martinmcadam.com

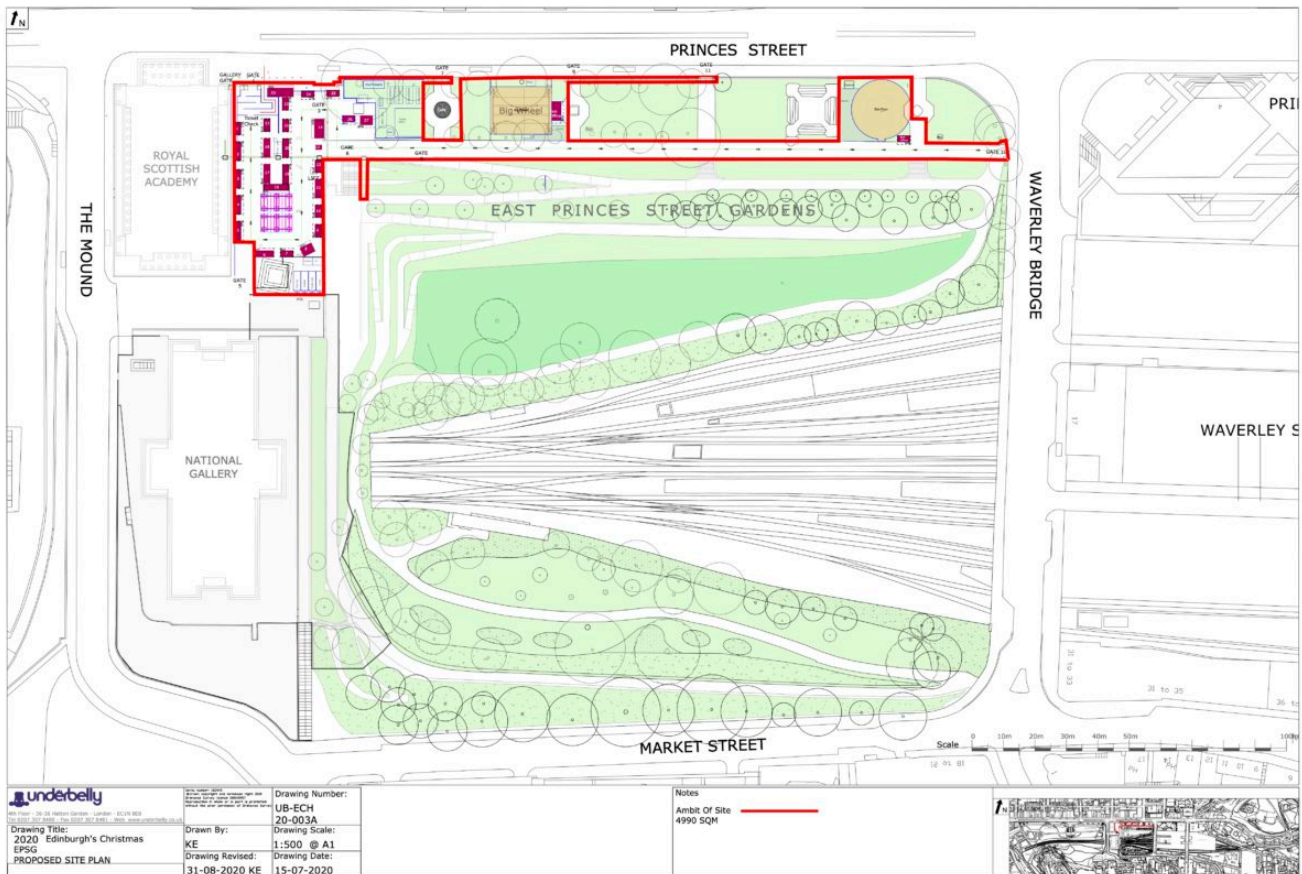
The footprint of the Christmas event in the gardens will be much smaller than in previous years, as it will be confined to the upper tier of the gardens and the hardstanding area at the Mound where the 27 Christmas market stalls will be sited. There will be no market stalls in the gardens themselves. The site is bounded by the galleries to the west and Waverley Bridge to the east. There will be nothing on the slopes or on the valley floor, as there has been in the years since the markets here began in 2014.

The application has been approved subject to several additional conditions including the provision of more accessible toilet facilities, restriction of the build phase around the Remembrance Garden to a period from 12 noon on 12 November onwards, (with some specific restrictions on building on 11th November itself), supervision of tree protection with Heras fencing, exploration of more environmentally friendly power supplies than diesel generators on site, a provision that if any material increase in the development is planned this must be referred back to the Development Management Sub-Committee rather than to any council officer under delegated powers. Access for disabled people will be referred to the Access Panel and the operators will be encouraged to explore the use of a noise receptor.

As the part of the garden at the corner of Waverley Bridge will not be used as part of the site councillors are keen to ensure that public access there is discouraged as it is a grass surface. Cllr Mary Campbell suggested the parks department could undertake to monitor that area, although others such as Cllr Mowat said they did not want to erect any out of bounds signs.

Underbelly have undertaken in their application that the decommissioning of the sites will take 10 days and will be completed by the middle of January 2022.

Despite the obvious impact on listed buildings nearby, the advice from council officers is that such harm is outweighed by the economic and cultural benefits the events.



History

There was an enforcement investigation into last year's unauthorised operation by the company which found that a breach of planning control had occurred. This was solved by Edinburgh's Christmas coming to an end in January 2020 and all the stalls and attractions were then removed. The investigation discovered that the landscaping works related to the National Galleries were compromised by the platform on which the market was placed, but the report states that again this was resolved when the landscaping was restored. The report concluded that if any of this happened again then enforcement action would be considered.

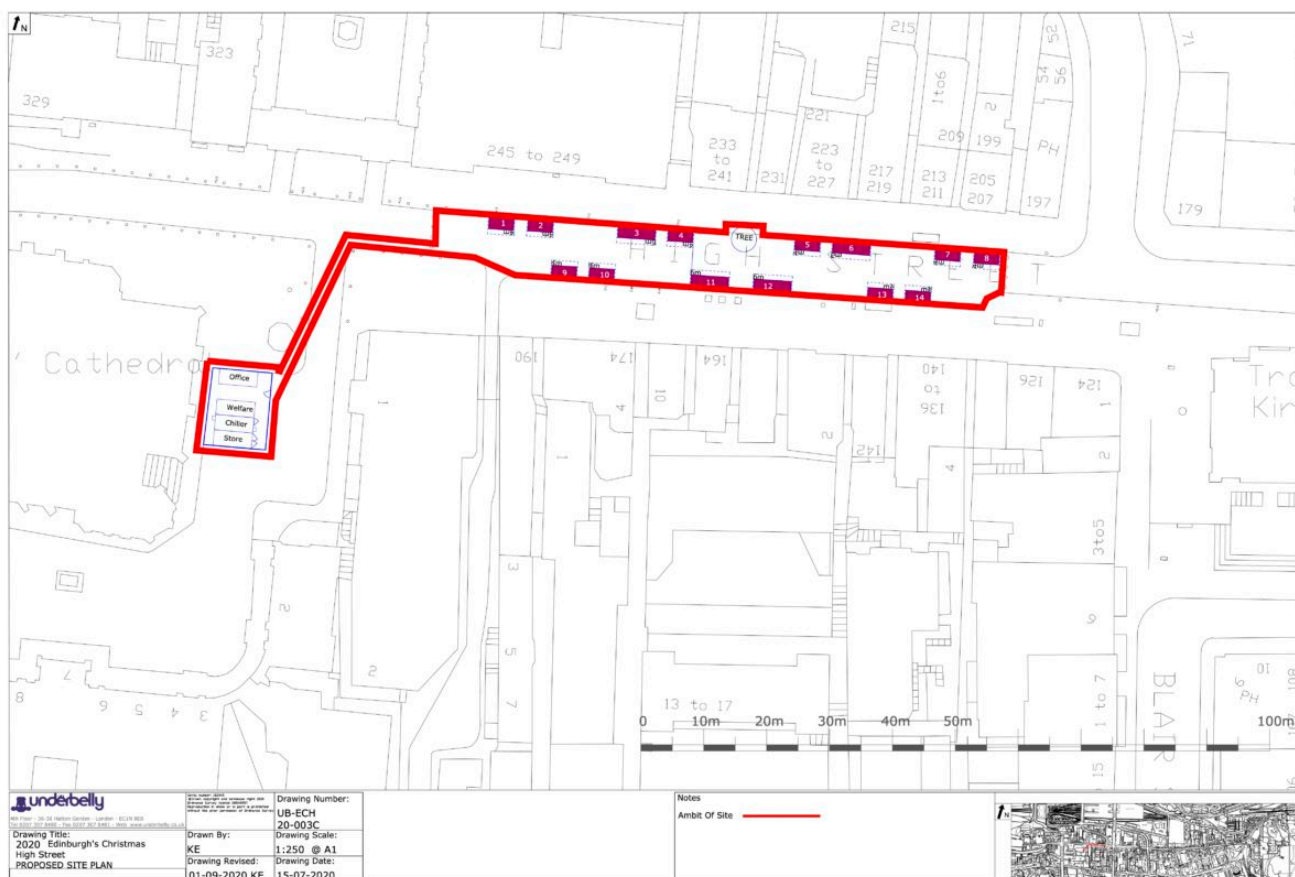
The truth is that the restoration of the garden took until the summer to complete, such was the damage to the valley floor in particular.



The photo of East Princes Street Gardens with a new lawn was taken on 31 May 2020. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

There will be other sites on George Street on the block between Charlotte Square and Castle Street, and the High Street at Parliament Square. The pavements here will remain open, and as is usual the cycle lane will also be kept open and unobstructed.

The application for Castle Street will include an ice rink, with an adjacent bar and more Christmas Market stalls. This will be placed on the parking bays in the central area of the street and additional conditions about noise affecting the nearby hotel and offices will be imposed. Again the matter of disabled access was discussed and flagged to the applicant. There will be 18 stalls sited in George Street, along with the ice rink, which started off in the lower part of Princes Street Gardens, then moved to St Andrew Square and may now find a more permanent home in George Street. There will also be a bar with a viewing deck.



The High Street planning application covers Christmas market stalls, a tree, site offices, stores and ancillary facilities.

This is not only for the pedestrianised square in front of St Giles where there will be 14 market stalls, but also for the extent of the High Street to the top of Cockburn Street. This application has been continued to allow for further information on access arrangements. Cllr Mowat raised that the Spaces for People closure at the other end of the High Street is an obstacle.

She said she has already raised this on behalf of Cockburn Street residents who have to access their homes via the High Street. “We need to be sure what this space will be doing next year. This (the High Street) is not a pedestrianised space at present, and there is no parking on Cockburn Street as it stands. This will become an isolated site for anyone with disabilities to get to.”

Cllr Neil Gardner said he was happy to pause this application

to allow for more information and more clarity. As this is a local application the timescale allows for that.