

Hidden Door comes out into the open

This year's Hidden Door remains true to the festival's ethos of bringing a disused place to public attention, but the only building on the site will actually be out of bounds to the public, and probably also the performers.

The festival which takes place between 15 and 19 September 2021 will be a major happening in Granton right next to the gasometer. It is an ideal location out of doors and with plenty of space to allow for social distancing, while bringing somewhere that is underused to public attention which is always part of the Hidden Door ethos.



Cllr Cammy Day

It was Cllr Cammy Day who represents the local area who first proposed the idea of using this outdoor site to festival organisers, responding to their search on Instagram earlier this year saying that he would love the festival to come to Granton.

Cllr Day, who is both local councillor and Chair of the All Party Oversight Group on the council's £1.3 billion Granton Waterfront Project, told The Edinburgh Reporter: "The festival that's going to happen at West Granton will be just the start of it. I've also had recent discussions with the Fly Festival, which some people might know brings 3,000 to 4,000 young people into the city centre every year. It has been a huge success, and they would also be keen to come here. We've had kind of formal discussions with the Festival Fringe, about whether this could become a venue of the future for some events that they host. So yes, it's an absolute up and coming

place.

“Some have said that we have turned our backs on the waterfront for many years. It’s now time to face up to that and do something exciting. This is a place for people to live and work. There is a site for 4,000 homes here, and we also want to have jobs so that people can live in a 20 minute neighbourhood.

“It’s the best part of the city for me. It has so much opportunity to create amazing houses for people, jobs as well as a college and major employers like Scottish Gas. I want to encourage more big employers and I want to put out a call to the development world in the future to come to us with ideas for the gas tower. You know there’s a park built into one in King’s Place in London or it could be like the one in Dublin with homes inside. Across the world there are gas towers which have been transformed into something amazing. So I am confident the same will happen here.

“But for this year Hidden Door are an extremely creative group of people. They have a track record of opening up sites like this and making them usable by the public so I am really looking forward to it.”

We went for a cycle around Granton with Cllr Day and recorded this podcast:



David Martin Creative Director and founder of Hidden Door Creative Director, David Martin, says that the thought of an outdoor festival on this disused site is very exciting, and certainly the initial photos from a secret photo shoot (with fireworks) show what will be a beautiful backdrop. This site ticks the boxes in more ways than one as it is outdoors, and it is a site which really needs to be brought to public

attention.

This was not the only site that the festival organisers had in their sights, but they had to cancel “quite a well-formed plan” at a venue which they may be able to use in the future, but would certainly not be suitable for 2021.

David said that the council and Edinburgh College who manage the site have both been very helpful to Hidden Door.

In truth the festival will be on the empty piece of ground right next to the gasometer, but the thought of using the historic structure as a backdrop has really got the creative juices flowing.

David said: “There is a fence between us, but it looms up at the back of the site in a kind of exciting way. It’s difficult to find an outdoor site that is dominated by a 157 foot high Victorian landmark. It’s a brilliant thing to have that nobody else is doing.

“It’s just a big empty yard, so we have to work quite hard to kind of turn it into something which will be really fun and exciting to be in. I suppose part of the fun and the pleasure of organising the event is that we can design it with a really blank canvas. Normally, we have a building to work with, which dictates the shape of the event for us. We’ve decided to make sure this time that if there are even Level one or Level two social distancing restrictions in place Hidden Door will still be able to take place.”

The ongoing presence of the virus means this is an ideal location, and David told us that there will be a music stage, but the organisers want people to be able to stand back from it. And the stage will be in front of the gas holder tower which David said will be involved “somehow” in the performances, but there will be much more to see.

He said: “There will be lots of things to discover which has

always been the idea of Hidden Door – that people will come along for one reason or another, maybe to see a band. But before they get to see the band they end up exploring a whole bunch of different things. In the very first Hidden Door at The Roxy Art House in 2010, I organised an art exhibition with a bunch of friends. We decided to involve some music, and so we built a maze of stud walls.

“It was a bit like going to a degree show and you see lots of compartments, or cubicles. In order to get to the stage where the bands were playing, you had to find your way through this maze of little corridors and little rooms that we created. People put bits of art inside them, so you had to find your way through all this art to get to the thing you actually wanted to see. But it was really good fun.”

The idea of exploring and finding is very much what we're really all about.

David Martin

Creative Director Hidden Door Festival

In September there is always a chance of what David calls “Scottish drizzle”, but this will be dealt with by using stretch tents to create some covered areas. On the music front with Pictish Trail one of the key announcements, but this festival is not all about music, there are going to be two theatre shows each day in this shorter edition of the festival which has in the past run to ten days.

That part of the programme will be held in a covered building across the street, although the more detailed plans for that part of the festival are still a little under wraps.

The organisers are working with Tortoise in a Nutshell which is a Leith-based theatre company who promise a “blend of puppetry, performance and innovation”. You can get a flavour

of what is possible here in their showreel, but they have confirmed to The Edinburgh Reporter that they are looking at bringing back a slightly older piece called Feral to the festival. It premiered at the Fringe in 2013 when it picked up a Fringe First at Summerhall, and this will be the first time it has been performed in Edinburgh for a long time.

And there will be a “spectacular dance programme” along with a spoken word selection, and visual art will form an important part of the festival line-up which will be announced in July. As well as all of this there will be bars and social areas so that there is lots to explore.

David himself is an artist of increasing importance and recognises that art college graduates missed out on their degree shows this year and last. The visual art programme will feature the work of recent graduates who are currently being rounded up.

[The music line up](#) is impressive with an array of Scottish based musicians and bands. The idea of Hidden Door is never to bring in a big name which would take up the limelight, but rather to shift the spotlight on to a variety of Scottish based talent. That said, David revealed that Pictish Trail will be headlining the opening night.

He said: “The band is headed up by Johnny Lynch who lives on the island of Eigg who does a huge amount for Scottish music talent. He runs a festival on Eigg called the Howlin’ Fling and also runs a music label from there called Lost Map. And Edinburgh-based singer songwriter Hamish Hawk will probably play on the same night as Pictish Trail. He writes very intelligent songs and we are exciting about profiling people like him before a live audience.”

The festival dance programme will be curated by Tess Letham and Skye Reynolds. David said they are looking at ways of making the staging quite spectacular, (perhaps short of

putting them on the gas holder) but it is still a work in progress.

The festival has staged various shows as livestreams over the last year all funded by Creative Scotland. These are now going to be available for live audiences to watch, including the Scottish harp player Esther Swift's work, The Call. In that she assembled different musicians all socially distanced on the beach. She will present The Call in the gas works using the size of the site to bring the musicians together.

Some live streaming from Granton may be included as part of the festival but it is dependent on funding, but David feels this is not a major part of the event – it is the live element which people are now craving. David said: "I feel there is a lot of fatigue around online content now, but we are still planning some and we will partner up with Edinburgh College to deliver some of that content but it will include more of what is going on backstage and intimate performances."

With a smaller audience capacity likely, the festival is much more dependent on raising funding than in previous years when bar sales, ticket sales and sponsorship was heading them towards some sort of financial independence.

Edinburgh College occupy the site where the festival will be held, and they will use the four days of the festival and the months leading up to it as a training opportunity for their students.

Tickets are already on sale

www.hiddendoorblog.org/tickets



David Martin surveying the scene at Granton ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter