

Council clarifies rules on events in West Princes Street Gardens

After a long tortuous discussion, mainly around procedural possibilities, the council's Culture and Communities Committee approved by a narrow margin to set terms and conditions in place for events in West Princes Street Gardens and at the Ross Bandstand.

The number of large events has also been limited until a solution is found to the rockfall from Edinburgh Castle.

This decision was passed against opposition from Cllr Hal Osler and Ed Thornley who wanted the matter continued until a larger report on managing events and filming in the city is ready in December. Cllr Osler was vocal in her plea for the decision to be delayed by two months so that all the results of a consultation could be included and referred to.

The Director of Place, Paul Lawrence, admitted that council officers did not have to bring this matter to this morning's

meeting and said such changes could all have been dealt with under delegated powers.

What has been decided however is that there are now clear rules on events held in West Princes Street Gardens and the number of large events which can be held there will be limited to just four – Edinburgh's Hogmanay, Edinburgh International Festival (EIF) opening or closing concert and two others on separate days. (By definition one of these must already be Edinburgh's Christmas. The contract was only awarded this week and refers to events such as SantaLand in West Princes Street Gardens.)

The new operating guidelines detail ways of events organisers accessing the gardens while the entrance to King's Stables Road remains closed as it has been since 2019. The rules will also seek to minimise any environmental damage to St Cuthbert's Churchyard which is the only way in and out while no work has yet been carried out on the Castle rock – largely the responsibility of Historic Environment Scotland.



St Cuthbert's Parish Church where events organisers have a right of access from Kings Stables Road at the time of setting

up events in the gardens

There is also specific mention of any events organisers taking care of the trees in the gardens and the roots. The guidance states: "All root protection measure must meet British Standards 5837" and asks for all tree protection measures to be in place before any other build commences.

The council passed a parks manifesto in 2014 and that is still in force, but these new regulations are intended to cover a particular problem while new applications to use areas of the gardens are made to the council. The intention is to empower council officers to approve or reject applications meantime.

The manifesto limited large events to four where they stray outside the Ross Bandstand which is the main events space, but any events which only use the Ross Bandstand are unaffected by its terms. Mr Lawrence said the council actively invited more use of the bandstand as it was underused.

Any events which take place wholly within the Ross Bandstand are unaffected by the new rules. The bandstand has a capacity of 2,700 depending on production and floor plans.



Ross Bandstand. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com
Cllr Val Walker, Culture and Communities Convener said: "With the return of an evolving events sector following the pandemic, we have had to revise how event organisers access and use the Gardens and the Ross Bandstand for events and concerts. The primary reasons are the necessary closure of the goods entrance to West Princes Street Gardens at King's Stables Road due to rockfall and our commitment to increasing our environmental protection measures.

"Until a more permanent solution for the rockfall is found, these guidelines will limit major events in the gardens to four per year. This will maintain viable vehicle access for event organisers whilst minimising disruption to the public use of the park, supporting our environmental protection of the Gardens. Smaller events taking place in the Ross Bandstand itself remain unaffected. By clarifying these guidelines we hope event organisers and community groups will have all the information they need before applying."

Cllr Osler said she felt this was a "cart and horse approach"

and the committee should wait until December. She said: “We don’t know that this will no conflict with the next report as we haven’t seen it. I don’t really think there is anything we really need to do today, particularly as there have been so many issues with things in Princes Street Gardens. I cannot see why another couple of months is going to make much difference”

Deciding on the new rules would appear to have already had an effect on events organisers. [The Scotsman](#) reports that DF Concerts has already cancelled next year’s Summer Sessions in light of the council’s decision. Our view is that this is perhaps premature – and that any concerts wholly within the bandstand (as outlined above) are allowed and are unaffected by the limit on the number of large events. But can Summer Sessions, and any other concert producers limit themselves in that way?



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Edinburgh's Hogmanay in Princes Street Gardens PHOTO © Lloyd Smith