

Christmas events may get permission for five years – despite concerns

Questions have been raised about the decision to grant the Edinburgh Christmas Market planning permission for five years – despite calls for the council to re-examine the way the event is run.

New organisers Unique Assembly [stepped in at the eleventh hour](#) to run the festival following the collapse of a multi-million pound deal between the council and Angels Event Experience (AEE), leading to calls for the council to look at taking over management of the event.

Despite this, officials have recommended that recurring planning permission is granted for five years – as concerns were also raised about the events' impact on Princes Street Gardens.

Previous operators Underbelly came under fire after [trees were damaged](#) and large sections of the city centre gardens were left in a terrible condition, taking months to recover from the occupation of traders and funfair rides throughout December.



Princes Street Gardens 25 October 2019

Unique Assembly has promised there will be “no detrimental impact” on the World Heritage Site.

But while supporting the winter festivals’ contribution to the local economy, Edinburgh World Heritage (EWH) said the current proposals will harm the city’s World Heritage Site and ‘encroach’ on landscaping in the Gardens.

In a letter to the council, EWH’s head of conservation, Jane Robertson, said: “The current proposal encroaches on the designed landscape of the Gardens, which was specifically designed for to provide high quality open space and garden monuments, with temporary structures which are not in keeping with the character of their environment.

“The proposals cause physical wear on the public realm. While this temporary in nature, it is regular and impacts on this important space for a significant period of the year.”

Applications going to the planning sub-committee on Wednesday (November 9) are seeking permission for the various rides and stalls coming to the city centre for Christmas.

Officials have urged the committee to approve the plans for the amusements which include the big wheel, carousels and 'fun flyer' in Princes Street Gardens and George Street's ice rink.

And Ms Robertson also raised questions over the council's recommendation to grant temporary planning permission recurring for a five-year period.

She said: "We recommend that approval of the application, should it be given, is subject to further consultation and refinement relating to heritage impact, for years two to five of that period."

And she added the tight time-scales and last-minute nature of the applications "has not allowed adequate time to consider, consult, comment and collaborate with the applicant to amend the proposals".

A tree protection plan has been included Unique Assembly's application, showing new structures to protect trunks and roots.

A spokesperson for Unique Assembly Limited said: "We have engaged with our own in-house arborist and the council parks team to give advice and best practice with regards tree protection.

"We agree that elements of the current application do not suitably account for the root zone and will be applying learnings from years of working in urban landscapes to ensure the event does not have any long term impacts on the green spaces as proposed."

Whilst planning permission is set to be granted for the period between 4 November 4 and 4 January, Edinburgh City Council has

said the Christmas market's construction will not commence until after 13 November to ensure that the Princes Street Garden Remembrance Garden is not disturbed during the period of Remembrance.

by Donald Turvill

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