

# **Plans for summer events in Princes Street Gardens – maybe**

**The Culture & Communities Committee will hear about council plans to use the Ross Bandstand and raise some much needed income in the process.**

**In brief, the plans are that it will be left for the Director of Place – Paul Lawrence who is about to take over as new Council Chief Executive in June – to negotiate any programme for August 2024 under delegated powers – probably due to lack of time.**

The Culture Committee only meets every couple of months and the next meeting is not until August.

There is a draft programme of events – which has only been made possible from the council deciding that there would only be certain major events held in Princes Street Gardens – including the Edinburgh International Festival (EIF) – and EIF confirming it will not use its slot this year or next. Council

officers regard this as an opportunity to allow the gardens to be “animated sensitively and flexibly during the summer”.

Fifty years ago there was Scottish country dancing on Saturday evenings in the summer months, but that – surely the best representation of authentic Scottish entertainment – has long gone. It was revived a few years back, but the pandemic appears to have put a halt to it.

The Watchtower Group, the company which runs the Fly music events and which has used the gardens in the past, has approached the council expressing the wish to put on a programme of events from April to September. But the company did not want to pay the council’s approved charges, instead seeking a partnership arrangement. It is not clear if Watchtower remain involved in any 2024 programme.

If councillors agree on Thursday then a programme of events could be allowed during August, with final details left to the Executive Director, and subject to being shared with the Festival and Events All Party Oversight Group (APOG).

In future years events might take place in May, during the Summer Festivals (“low impact animation”), in September and also in the winter through Edinburgh’s Christmas and Hogmanay contracts.

Earlier this year the council looked into ways of charging a levy on events in the gardens and being able to contribute to a Gardens Fund. A report about this possibility will be discussed in August.

## **Rockfall**

Council officers will continued to talk to Historic Environment Scotland (HES) about dealing with any rockfall from Edinburgh Castle Rock so that the entrance from King’s

Stables Road can be opened again. HES have form here as they closed the Radical Road in Holyrood Park for similar reasons of safety, and have simply not reopened it.

## The Quaich Project



The concept design for The Quaich Project

In 2016 it was planned to erect a new building in the gardens with the help of a £5 million donation from the boss of Apex Hotels, Norman Springford. These plans halted after an international architectural competition, and also much wrangling over the public use of the gardens versus any perceived private gain, and Mr Springford stepped back in 2020.

One positive which did come from Mr Springford's philanthropy was that the Ross Fountain was overhauled in a £2 million project – something for everyone to enjoy over these last few years.

On quitting as chairman of the Quaich Project as it was known, Mr Springford, the founder of The Ross Development Trust, said



in 2020: “Since we started this project there has been an underlying perception that our intentions are either commercial or to privatise the gardens. This is of course completely untrue.

“In particular, my motivations have been questioned. I believe that this has become a distraction to the project’s ambitions which are honourable and would ultimately benefit all of Edinburgh.

“It is for these reasons, that I have decided to take a step back to allow someone else to lead the project and to give it the best chance of being realised.

“The original vision, which continues to be held dear by the board and team, is purely to improve these loved but underfunded gardens.”



Ross Fountain. Photo: © 2021, Martin P. McAdam  
[www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)



Edinburgh Diwali used the bandstand in 2023 – the parade stepped off from St Andrew Square to the Ross Theatre in Princes Street Gardens PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter