

Council set to spend £120,000 on 'civic projections' to mark the city's 900th birthday

Edinburgh Council is set to spend £120,000 on 'civic projections' to mark the city's 900th birthday.

The authority is seeking a contractor to organise "night-time outdoor public projection mappings" in a bid to "enhance civic pride".

The art installations are being billed as the "tentpole activity" of celebrations to mark nine centuries since Edinburgh was granted royal burgh status.

Plans to spend £500k of taxpayers' cash to commemorate the milestone amid rising poverty have sparked a backlash from opposition councillors in the City Chambers.

As the sum was included in a budget passed by Labour, Lib Dem and Conservative members in February the SNP group branded the move "shameful" while services were being cut.

And the Greens have played down the importance of 'Edinburgh 900' which they described as simply an "administrative event" with little historical significance.

Council leader Cammy Day, Labour, defended the programme of events being organised, telling councillors it was the "right thing to do for a city as historic as Edinburgh".

He said at the time the council would seek corporate sponsors “to replace some of that [funding] if we can”. However, it has since emerged a £250k bid to the National Lottery’s Heritage Fund to help offset the costs has been rejected.

At a recent council meeting, the Greens’ Dan Heap raised concerns over money being spent on outdoor projections.

While he said his group supported moves to use some of the £500k set aside for grants for community groups to arrange events, he added they “took issue” with other areas of spending.

“We think at a time when there’s high levels of poverty and inequality in the city some of these expenditures maybe don’t cast us in a particularly good light,” he said. “There is going to be money spent on light projections and I wonder if those really are absolutely necessary at a time where people are struggling.”

He also stressed that the council “shouldn’t be spending any of this money on a council knees up,” adding: “I understand if the Lord Provost wants that then it’s coming out of the Lord Provost’s budget.

“We can’t be having a party in the City Chambers or wherever to celebrate this.”

The council is currently inviting tenders from contractors “who can manage end-to-end project requirements including content creation, projection mapping, and logistical execution” and offering £120,000 to the successful bidder.

A contract award notice said: “As part of a wider events programme (‘Edinburgh 900’), the City of Edinburgh Council is seeking to commemorate this milestone through the Edinburgh 900 Civic Projections.

“These night-time outdoor public projection mappings, running

sometime between September 2024 to March 2025, are designed as free art installations to enhance civic pride, engage with our rich cultural history, and support our vibrant creative sector.

“This one-off project will take place at one or more of the iconic sites within the city.

“The projection mappings are envisioned as free, un-ticketed installations that tell Edinburgh’s history and story at night.”

It said the aims for the projections was to “gain resident and media interest as a tentpole activity of the Edinburgh 900 programme, explaining its themes and scope; showcase the City Collections held by Edinburgh City Archives, Edinburgh Libraries and Museums and Galleries Edinburgh in a creative and engaging fashion and tell the story of the city, and Promote the Edinburgh 900 events website and encourage attendance at other programme events”.

The council has also drawn up ten themes for the Edinburgh 900 programme, which is yet to be announced in full, with each event falling under one or more themes, which are:

- City of David (Burghs of Edinburgh, Royal connections, Municipal government, Capital city)
- City of Faith (Different faiths within the city, Religious buildings, Congregations)
- City of Commerce (Merchants, Baltic Sea Trade, Global Connections)
- City of Industry (Incorporations of trade, Industrial revolution, Modern industries)
- City of Conflict (Military connections, Reformation, Marian Civil War, Civil protests, Riots)
- City of Finance (Coinage, Royal Mint, Banks, Colonialism)
- City of Ideas (Enlightenment, New Town, Innovation,

Discoveries)

- City of Leisure (Tourism, Parks, Sports, Railways, Hotels)
- City of Celebration (Festival, Fringe, Other annual events)
- City of Diversity (Immigration past and present, Edinburgh residents today, 2050 City Vision)

Edinburgh's Lord Provost Robert Aldridge said: "Edinburgh 900 represents almost a millennium of our shared history.

"The full programme will examine how Edinburgh came to be over the centuries, from commerce to conflict and from faith to finance, there are an incredibly rich and varied set of themes.

"The programme will also celebrate Edinburgh in the present day and look ahead to our future ambitions and aspirations."

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter