

Big Wheel proposal may not happen at all

A proposal for the wheel in East Princes Street Gardens to be put up for a longer period than it has been previously is just that – only a proposal – and it may not happen at all.

The events organiser UniqueAssembly had made the application to the council for consideration and discussion – but before they knew it the proposal was being touted as actually being a planning application of some kind.

A spokesperson for Unique Assembly said: “A proposal to discuss the feasibility to present the Edinburgh Big Wheel during summer was submitted through the Public Spaces Application process, but we appreciate there are many factors which need to be considered to see if this is a viable proposition for the city as a summer attraction.

“As part of our feasibility exercise, we await feedback from the application process next week, to see if there is any desire from The City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) for further dialogue.”

Culture and Communities Convener, Val Walker said: “An application has been received from a third party, and we are currently engaging with local stakeholders as part of our public spaces event process. A decision is expected to be made by the end of the month, and if required it will be referred

to the Culture and Communities Committee.”

The Edinburgh Reporter understands that any extension to the time when the Big Wheel is in place is “unlikely to happen” as the plan may not work out financially either for UniqueAssembly or the city council.

ENVIRONMENT

There are environmental reasons why the proposal for the 45 metre high structure could be considered beneficial, as the carbon footprint of the construction and take down would have less impact – although that would have to be weighed against running the attraction for longer. If the proposal is viable then any extra monies raised might allow for the installation of proper electrical connections rather than diesel generators in future – which would be better for the environment.

The council charges for Major Events in the gardens (and the installation of the big wheel for the period from 1 July 2025 to 3 January 2026 might be considered a “major event”). The cost is believed to be in the region of £4,000 per day payable to the city council – and for 187 days would be £748,000. Whether the wheel would earn enough revenue for the operator or indeed the council was still under consideration when the idea became public.

Details of the proposal as communicated to stakeholders

The fully transportable wheel would be assembled on the existing pile caps in East Princes Street – in the same place as the Christmas Wheel is installed. It has 36 gondolas with a maximum of six people in each pod.

The information sent to stakeholders by the council mentioned that there would be a pause in operation around the

Remembrance period, although apart from that it might be open seven days a week. It is thought the wheel could be part of the Edinburgh 900 celebrations this year.

The views enjoyed from the wheel would be quite different in summer than in winter – and the Big Wheel has been a part of the Christmas attractions since 2022. It has welcomed almost 200,000 people and would attract a new audience in the summer months – for a “more sedate” experience.

John Mitchell a member of Old Town Community Council said to The Herald: “This application would mean the tourists, residents and folk who enjoy their lunch breaks there would lose the park permanently.”

Cockburn Association

The Cockburn Association have condemned the plan as it would amount to the “commodification and gentrification of a public asset” and they warn of the effects of over tourism.

A spokesperson for The Cockburn said: “We have been informed by both colleagues in various City Centre Community Councils, Cockburn members as well as the media regarding the proposed erection of the Big Wheel in East Princes Street Gardens from 1 July 2025 to 3 January 2026. The Association does not appear to have been notified of this proposal despite our long-standing interest in such activities in the Gardens but also in the context of regular notifications we receive of events at Calton Hill.

“The Association would like to make a number of observations, and register our concern and objection into these proposals and associated process.

“Firstly, we understand that a formal planning application is to be submitted by the proposers shortly. Given the need for a statutory planning consent for this, the Association

believes most strongly that the planning process should take precedent over any other consenting regime. As such, we ask for no decision to be made until such time as a formal decision on planning is made.

“Secondly, we are concerned at not being notified of this proposal through the public spaces protocols in place. Effective and transparent communication of significant interventions in public spaces is essential. Using this process for such a major proposal is clandestine and to be avoided.”

Public Space Event guidance

The council has guidance on holding public space events [here](#) which is the process that UniqueAssembly used.



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