

Beltane Fire Society disappointed with ticket levy

The organisation which is behind the fire festival each year has said it is “deeply disappointed” with the proposed ticket levy which the council agreed in October last year.

Beltane Fire Society said that the levy will have implications for the city’s “ability to hold safe cultural and community-based events” in the capital.

A spokesperson said: “The Society has long supported efforts to preserve and enhance the cultural heritage of Edinburgh, yet the imposition of increased costs, alongside a lack of transparency and effective planning, threatens the vibrancy of the city’s cultural scene. The inclusion of Calton Hill into the Premier Parks Events Levy Project represents a targeted attack on our festival, because no other event on Calton Hill will meet the eligibility for the levy.

“The Beltane Fire Society was not consulted on the ticket levy during the public spaces consultation process, which further undermines trust between the council and event organisers. With skyrocketing event sector costs increasing beyond inflation, already strained budgets, and the continued mismanagement of council budgets park resources, we fear this levy will only serve to diminish Edinburgh’s thriving arts community, undermining our shared commitment to fostering cultural expression and public participation. This is a blow

to both the city's heritage and the sense of belonging that events like Beltane create."

The Beltane said that their costs will increase from £9,576.50 in 2024 to £18,476.50 in 2025. Of this the levy in 2025 of £8,874.00 makes up the largest part of the costs in staging the festival.

The City of Edinburgh Council culture and communities convener, Cllr Val Walker, said: "As a council it is our duty and responsibility to manage our parks and greenspaces, protecting and preserving them for the future.

"The fee charged for hosting commercial events on all of our premier park sites, including at Calton Hill, is ring-fenced for site improvements in the area.

"These funds are administered by the council and spending priorities are identified by engaging with The Calton Hill Conservation Trust and other local stakeholders including the Collective Gallery and the Beltane Society themselves as a key user of the site.

"These improvements are designed to ensure all visitors to the park can enjoy it for years to come."

Levy charged

The council agreed the levy through the Culture and Communities committee in May 2024, and charges were implemented in seven of the premier parks in Edinburgh from 1 October 2024, including Princes Street Gardens and the Ross Bandstand, Meadows and Bruntsfield Links, Calton Hill, Inverleith Park, Leith Links, Saughton Park and the grounds of Lauriston Castle.

The levy is charged in addition to other charges for waste and cleansing transport and other costs that the council incurs when supporting events in the parks. This is charged on a

sliding scale based on the ticket price and overall capacity of the event. Where the event attracts an audience of more than 20,000 and the ticket prices are more than £50 the charge is £3 per ticket. The council has agreed to review the process and charges.

The Calton Hill Conservation Trust presented a deputation to the Culture committee in December when councillors agreed to charge the levy. The expressed the view that it was not sustainable for the tourist and events industry to continue to use the hill without contributing to the maintenance. They said that they largely welcomed the parks levy and thought the monies raised should be used for maintenance and not limited to development improvements. The Trust also referred to the Biodiversity Management Plan funded by Inspiring Scotland that they were currently developing and hoped that the management of scrub planning would be subject to that in due course.



PHOTO Sébastien Lemaire for Beltane Fire Society.

Beltane 2025

This year's Beltane will take place on 30 April lighting up Calton Hill in a celebration with traditional Celtic retelling. It has taken place in the city since 1988.

This year the theme is centred in reviving cultural and spiritual connection to the earth, and costumes will be made of foraged materials. The traditional stories of The May Queen and the Death and Rebirth of the Green Man will be retold.

Jenny Bloom, Beltane Society's Chair, said: "Hundreds of volunteers are already hard at work building the props, stories and music that will weave into this year's Beltane Festival. In these strange and difficult times, moments of joy, hope and community are so important. We're excited to share the transformational stories of Beltane with Edinburgh and the world."

Tickets are available here:
<https://www.citizenticket.com/events/beltane-fire-society/beltane-fire-festival-2024-1>