

AGM Report: NTBCC Culture & Communities Committee, 10 June 2024

The **NTBCC Culture & Communities Committee** has existed since 16 January 2023, though there are now only two members and the committee has not been formerly convened.

The scope of the committee is the same as the **City of Edinburgh Culture & Communities Committee (C&CC)** — ‘quality of life’ rather than ‘street corner’, also safety and ‘the community’, including community councils. The full remit is as follows:

Cultural development, festivals and events, sport and recreation, arts and museums, libraries and community centres, parks and green spaces, police and fire scrutiny, 20-minute neighbourhoods, community safety, community and locality planning, community councils, and community empowerment.

In the past, NTBCC members put many hours into deliberations regarding an overall rule-based system of the *Use of Public Spaces for Events and Filming* system for managing events, culminating in a deputation to C&CC on 13 December 2022.

We regret that *Use of Public Spaces*, though nominally completed and reported on 5 October 2023, has never become truly operational and been gradually superseded by individual reports, particularly regarding Princes Street Gardens.

During the past eight months, reports have come through C&CC in fits and starts and monitoring has been challenging. C&CC have actually only met on three occasions — 7 December, 29 February and 16 May — and all the substantial business was presented in the first and last of these meetings.

This is a review of the main issues that have come before the committee:

1. Events and festivals

A surprise report on the Use of West Princes Street Gardens and the Ross Bandstand went to C&CC on 16 May with officers recommending an increase in events held in West Princes Street Gardens. This was rejected by elected councillors who voted for uphold present limits on large-scale events.

Reports included assessments of the *2023 summer festivals*, *Filming in Edinburgh 2023*, and *Edinburgh's Christmas and Edinburgh's Hogmanay 2023/2024* and a ‘*Revised Charging Model*’ for events in public spaces.

NTBCC have always been concerned by the contrast between high claims for 'commercial benefits' to the city from events, and apparently low actual charges by the council to commercial organisations occupying public spaces. This is something we would like to re-examine in the future.

2. Parks, greenery and trees

A series of reports have come through C&CC on *Trees in the city - Tree Management Services, Edinburgh Million Tree City, Parks and Openspace Investment, Park Lighting Project* and *Temporary Toilet Facilities*.

We remain concerned about the equitable distribution of funding — there still appears to be no money for Calton Hill, despite being designed as one of six premium parks and being listed as priority 6 out of 58 parks for lighting improvement — and the geographical distribution of tree planting, which seems to be skewed towards rural rather than urban areas.

3. Fireworks Control Zones (FCZ)

The power to make a Fireworks Control Zone (FCZ) has been introduced following the passing of national legislation, in time for Bonfire Night (5 November). (An application has been made by the Calton Hill Conservation Trust to be assessed by "Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Police Scotland and Council Officers".)

4. Amplification of sound in public spaces

In contrast to fireworks, this somewhat similar issue has repeatedly come to council without solution. NTBCC has always supported a Copenhagen-style approach to loud busking: no amplifiers. Unfortunately, the political parties have opted for more complex arrangements and these have not progressed, except for signage and an ongoing debate about who has the power to do what, and who would enforce it.

5. Women's safety in public places

This was a referral from the Policy and Sustainability Committee in connection with park lighting.

6. Libraries

There were reports on the future of our libraries and proposals to end overdue fees

7. Nelson Monument

The Nelson Monument on Calton Hill closed at the beginning of the pandemic. The Friends of Calton Hill (now the Calton Hill Conservation Trust/CHCT) were concerned about the state of the building. Brief reports were published in the CEC C&CC Business Bulletins. Finally scaffolding went up in early May, the broken black ball was removed, and the museum re-opened on 25 May (announced 'Murdoch divorce-style' one day earlier on X/twitter). We still have no clear decision on the way the two functioning toilets will be signed and used.

8. Community Council Scheme & Boundary Review

The important issue of community council reform, boundaries and the Scheme has been through full council (and dealt with by NTBCC as a whole), and is covered in the Engagement Plan 2024.

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8 June 2024