

NTBCC Culture and Communities Committee

Update – 9 October 2023

The CEC Culture and Communities Committee met on 5 October.

All the political parties accepted all of each other's addenda and amendments — at least on the items listed below — and there were no votes.

6.1 Business Bulletin: Nelson Monument — Project Update

Nelson Monument on Calton Hill continues to be shut because of *“issues of damage to the timber structure that supports the Time Ball mechanism as well as water ingress”*.

The cost is *“estimated to cost between £400,000 and £500,000 (against a budget of c. £63,000). If the funding is agreed, then Spring 2024 is likely to be the earliest full re-opening. . .”*

7.1 Amplification of sound in public spaces

One councillor referred to the council's inability to deal with this issue as a *“running sore”* with a 10 year history. Another talked about it taking *“25-years”* to solve. Meanwhile the Greens told us how much city centre residents *“love buskers”*.

All agreed that amplification was a problem, both for the buskers themselves, who were driven off their pitches by louder competitors, and for residents. The SNP stresses the importance of signage explaining CEC policy, though apparently it constantly disappears

City officers described the legal difficulties, lack of resources for enforcement. A twin track, bylaw or not a bylaw, approach was discussed.

There were SNP, Liberal Democrat and Green addendums all grappling with the problem. All were accepted.

NTBCC made a submission on this on 28 October 2021. NTBCC recommended a *“simple ban on amplification, following the successful Copenhagen policy, with musicians and other performers required to use natural acoustic sound.”*

No Edinburgh political party at present supports a Copenhagen-style policy.

7.2. Trees in the City – Tree Management Services.

The report was an affirmation of the importance of trees, particularly street trees, and of council policies.

“3.1 Trees are of tremendous value to the natural environment within the city and contribute towards what makes Edinburgh such a desirable place to visit, live, and explore. . . 3.3. For the most part, trees form an integral part of the cityscape. 4.3 The policy . . . reflects the Council’s commitment to increasing tree numbers under initiatives such as Edinburgh Million Tree City and protecting the city’s trees.”

Councillors believe residents don’t always appreciate trees enough. They were removing them and they needed educating not to do it. One way was to put printed literature in libraries.

All addenda were accepted, including a Liberal Democrat one: *“that the overdue Million Tree City annual update come to Committee at its February 2024 meeting”* and that *“the Million Tree City Annual Updates should become the main avenue for regular reporting on the state of trees in Edinburgh and that other regular reports on trees should be folded into that reporting”*.

Also from the greens: key performance indicators (KPIs), *“relating to trees / forestry in the Council ought to be revised to commit the Council to targets around not just planting trees but keeping trees alive . . .”*

7.3 Use of Public Spaces for Events and Filming

This approved the policy and the supporting guidance documents with an update in a year’s time.

At the onset all parties had agreed that an information system (online portal, *“one stop shop”* for *“enquiries, engagement, collating evidence, surveying and updating area information, report writing and template document creation.”* etc etc) was essential to a viable system, both for organisers and residents.

We don’t have this, instead, *“Officers will continue to investigate and provide costs for: An online system/web portal to make it easier to apply for and/or progress applications for use of public spaces for all activities”*. (5.2 etc).

“In January 2020, Committee agreed to combine the Edinburgh Parks Events Manifesto and the Public Spaces Protocol into a single Public Space Management Plan” (3.2) but instead there are still two separate documents (appendices 3 and 4).

The SNP amendment asked for *“a new button is added to the Council’s main “Report It” page”*, and the Conservatives similarly: *“Agrees that the Council’s ‘Report It’ website will have an additional link and ‘Report It’ function page added specifically in relation to events . . .”*

The Lib Dems that *“all complaints gathered through <publicspaces@edinburgh.gov.uk> will be collated and sent to the relevant service manager for their attention and included in the updates to the Festivals All Party Oversight Group.”*

NTBCC originally asked for a Complaints Hotline.

The Greens that: *“Event organisers should be asked to demonstrate how they going to avoid . . . damage to built and green areas”* and *“Organisers may be asked to provide some Community Benefits ... substantial and tangible for the local community and proportionate to the size of the event.”* and clarification of the *“real living wage”*.

All these passed.

Otherwise there was little discussion on the content. There is a lot more of substance in the report than before but according to my analysis, the policy still only covers half the topics we originally discussed.

It was discussed for less than 30 minutes.

7.5 Bonfire Night

Largely about community safety and anti-social behaviour.

SNP addendum: *“Requests Officers engage with colleagues in Parks to put measures in place to ensure health and safety measures are in place for public parks. This should include a focus on restricting vehicle access and ensuring public safety on Calton Hill.”*

Governance Community Council Scheme & Boundary Review 2023

The statutory consultation process will run from 9 October to 5 December. Contrary to (my) expectations, this is again a drop-in event — in four locations, including City Chambers and Waverley Court, plus TEAMS sessions on 6, 7, 16, and 23 November.

It's not clear how community councils will be able to make submissions. We still have no idea of the criteria used for the boundary review.

STOP PRESS!

A written online consultation was announced at midday on Friday 6 October — to start on 5 October (yes that's yesterday!) — at <<https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/cg/community-council-scheme-and-boundary-review-2023/>> and lasting until 18 December.

Simon Holledge, Convener, 6 October 2023