



**Cockburn Association Response to the City of Edinburgh Council's Consultation on the Future of the Ross Bandstand
17 December 2024**

Background

Since its inception in 1875, the Cockburn Association has resisted development in Princes Street Gardens and argued that its purpose is to provide much needed amenity and greenspace for the tranquil enjoyment of residents and visitors alike. Recently, we objected strongly to proposals to replace the existing 1930s Ross Bandstand with a 6-8,000 seat concert venue with ancillary commercial and hospitality space, proposed by the Ross Development Trust. However, we did support proposals to increase access to the gardens and improve areas for enjoyment, such as enhancement of the Blaise area for families. This scheme faltered for several reasons, including significant concerns about its suitability for the gardens and the World Heritage Site.

In May 2024, a paper was considered by the City of Edinburgh Council's Culture and Communities Committee to change the "4 major events" policy and make the Ross Bandstand available for an increased number of events proposing, as we understood it, a third party to help organise and implement (and pay?) for improvements to the Bandstand in exchange for increased secondary activity outside the bandstand area. The Association wrote to Committee members objecting in the strongest terms to the proposals, but also the lack of any form of consultation or even discussion with civic and residents' groups on the proposals. The Committee rejected the proposal unanimously.

This latest consultation seems to be a continuation of a process aimed at further commercialising West Princes Street Gardens.

Comments

The Cockburn Association appreciates the opportunity to respond to the City of Edinburgh Council's consultation on the future of the Ross Bandstand. We recognize the historical significance of the bandstand and fully support its refurbishment to preserve its heritage.

Additionally, we endorse its use for community and small-scale events, which align with the character and spirit of Princes Street Gardens.

However, we have significant concerns regarding the potential negative impacts of large-scale events at the Ross Bandstand on public access to Princes Street Gardens, the parkland and greenspace, and biodiversity. We feel that these two issues have been unnecessarily conflated and should not be; that is, for small community/local school events, it is not a requirement change the current "4 major events" policy.

Similarly, we feel that this consultation, and the previous report to the Culture & Communities Committee in May 2024, ignores the public value of the gardens. In surveys over the past few decades, its greenness and its tranquillity were cited as the top benefits for citizens. The continued pressure from the Council and others to turn West Princes Street Gardens and the Ross Bandstand into a major performance hub is not acceptable in this context.

We urge the Council to consider the following points:

1. **Heritage and World Heritage Site Status:** Princes Street Gardens are an integral part of Edinburgh's World Heritage Site, reflecting the city's rich history and cultural heritage. The gardens are not only a cherished green space but also a symbol of Edinburgh's commitment to preserving its historical landscapes. Any changes to the use of the Ross Bandstand must respect and enhance this heritage, ensuring that the gardens remain a place of historical and cultural significance.
2. **Adherence to Existing Restrictions:** The current restrictions, established less than two years ago after extensive public engagement, should be upheld. No evidence has been provided to justify overturning these restrictions, which were designed to protect the integrity of the gardens.
3. **Impact on Public Values:** Increasing commercial and semi-commercial activities in the gardens will undermine the two most valued attributes by the public – greenness and tranquillity. These qualities are essential to the character of Princes Street Gardens and must be preserved.
4. **Health and Wellbeing:** Access to greenspace is crucial for the health and wellbeing of the public. Princes Street Gardens provide a vital urban oasis where residents and visitors can relax, exercise, and enjoy nature. Large-scale events that restrict access to these spaces can negatively impact the community's physical and mental health.
5. **Climate Change Adaptation:** City centre greenspaces like Princes Street Gardens play a critical role in climate change adaptation. They help mitigate urban heat island effects, manage stormwater, and provide habitats for urban biodiversity. Preserving and enhancing these greenspaces is essential for building resilience against the impacts of climate change.
6. **Lack of Coherent Plans:** There are no coherent plans available for the conservation or enhancement of the Ross Bandstand. The proposed scope of activities does not appear to contribute to the improvement of its condition, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of the bandstand. Also, the current Conservation Management Plan and actions should be updated to reconsider the landscape setting of the bandstand. It is essential to have these in place before any changes are made to the current policy. Otherwise there is every likelihood that ad hoc interventions will result in a poorly integrated environment, negatively impacting on the qualities of this premier open space.
7. **Appropriate Consultation Venues:** The current consultation on the Waverley Valley and Princes Street is a more suitable forum to consider the broader use of the gardens. This approach ensures a comprehensive and integrated planning process that respects the unique attributes of the area.

In conclusion, while we support the refurbishment and appropriate use of the Ross Bandstand, we strongly advocate for the preservation of the existing restrictions and the protection of Princes Street Gardens' greenness and tranquillity.

We urge the Council to carefully consider the potential impacts of large-scale events and to prioritize the values and preferences of the public in their decision-making process.

Consultation Questions

The above formed part of our formal submission to the Council. In responding to this consultation exercise on the Council's Consultation Hub, we also suggested that several questions were not relevant to the consultation including those asking if you had attended an event at the Bandstand and whether you liked it or not. We were supportive of "low impact" events in general but did not support an increased number of events, especially major new ones in May and September. We also suggested that

as the gardens were a public space and on the Common Goods Asset register, the City Council as local authority should be responsible for managing it. Finally, we noted some repetition in the questions.

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