

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL
PUBLIC SPACE MANAGEMENT PLAN (PSMP) CONSULTATION:
CONTRIBUTION FROM EDINBURGH'S FESTIVALS 20 JANUARY 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

Edinburgh's major festivals welcome the city reviewing its approach to public space management.

We look forward to seeing the key principles and guidelines emerging from this consultation, and we set out below those areas where we see that further development is needed in order to strike the best balance for the city's future. Many of these issues are interconnected and span several of the specific ideas that have been posted to the consultation site, so while we have tried below to follow broadly the structure of headings suggested, we have provided this response as one whole document rather than posting comments in individual sections.

Festivals Edinburgh is the collective body for the eleven major international cultural festivals from Easter through the August peak season to Hogmanay – Edinburgh International Science Festival, Edinburgh International Children's Festival, Edinburgh International Film Festival, Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival, Edinburgh Art Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, Edinburgh International Book Festival, Scottish International Storytelling Festival, and Edinburgh's Hogmanay.

In a typical year, most festivals will stage work in different open spaces, with a mix of public and private ownership/management. Four festivals make major use of outdoor space: Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, Edinburgh International Book Festival and Edinburgh's Hogmanay. Most of the other seven festivals also feature outdoor programming as a smaller part of their offer, ranging from storytelling walks, photo exhibitions and art installations, to open air film and carnival celebrations, and the International Festival's opening and closing events.

However, there are no typical years at present, and **the fragile situation the city faces emerging from the Covid-19 crisis must be fully reflected in the Public Spaces Management Plan in order to realise the best balance of benefits for city residents.** The long-term scarring to the culture and events sectors could have an irreversible impact on the quality of life benefits for residents and on Scotland's creative and service sector workers, without a joined-up plan to retain and reimagine their positive impacts.

Local residents make up the biggest single segment of audiences for our world-renowned festivals with 1.8 million attendances a year, and their love for our signature homegrown events over 70+ years has created Edinburgh's heritage as a world-leading festival city. Generations of citizens have taken part in inspiring new experiences, and the festivals in turn have spearheaded the city's global reputation as pioneers in contemporary creativity. **Now is the time to map out how Edinburgh needs to future proof our world-leading festival city so we can be at the forefront of leading positive change as we emerge from the pandemic.**

Success means achieving a balance of cultural, social, economic and environmental sustainability. The extraordinary layout, fabric and environment of Edinburgh are part of the identity of the city and its festivals and critical to future success. **We are keen to play our part alongside other city partners in looking at the long term infrastructure and management needs for a world class, liveable and sustainable cultural capital and festival city, where a strong case can be made for investment in this future from all those who benefit from it.**

2. REFLECTING EDINBURGH

‘Temporary uses of public space should actively promote Edinburgh’s role and reputation as:

- the capital city of Scotland
- a globally recognised festival city
- an historic city (with Unesco World Heritage Site status)
- a cultural and sporting city
- a great place to live, do business, visit or study’

This section is classed as a guideline, but is central to the rationale for the Public Space Management Plan in setting out key aspects of Edinburgh’s distinctive city identity and how city strategies seek to build on these strengths for citywide benefit and balance them with everyday uses.

The content of this section should be included in an opening context-setting section of the PSMP, setting a clear direction for post-Covid adaptation and renewal and referencing other relevant city strategies including the Open Space Strategy on management of the city’s natural environment and the Event Strategy covering the set of signature annual city festivals and events strategically supported by the Council as well as the approach to supporting wider events and community-led activity. This will help all who use the Plan to understand from the outset the reference points for achieving a balance between the wide range of needs and preferences of different residents to enjoy their public spaces through everyday use and experiences beyond the everyday; and the need to realise social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits for the whole city.

3. ENVIRONMENT AND AMENITY

The festivals strongly support the guideline on considering permanent power supplies for areas frequently used for festivals and other events. As part of the festivals’ [collective environmental policy](#) commitment to make our contribution to Edinburgh being a zero carbon city by 2030, we are looking for Council plans to increase ‘plug and play’ event infrastructure and working with partners including the University’s centre for carbon innovation on piloting clean power generators.

Appropriate cost recovery needs a flexible case by case decision to balance immediate income imperatives with the city’s wider objectives, as there will be cases where cost sharing may be needed to achieve other goals such as encouraging a wider footprint of events across the city or supporting organisers developing new ventures. This flexibility is also relevant to the **Key Principle: Parking** which should be aligned with the Environment and Amenity guideline so the principle is that any loss of parking income will be subject to appropriate cost recovery from the organiser.

The city needs more event-ready spaces where hard standing and power and IT infrastructure are inbuilt, as part of a sustainable cultural infrastructure strategy. With seriously limited public funding, it will be important to focus on how additional investment can also be generated to resource this e.g. property developers’ premiums. However, given the lack of hard standing space in many parts of the city and limited gap sites with strong potential as new event locations, any blanket ban on temporary structures or equipment on grass or earth could have a damaging impact on a range of events at all scales, and issues should be managed through area guidance instead.

For festival and event operators to play a full part in the emissions reductions required by 2030, the necessary shifts need to be made with a plan for all organisations and businesses to transition over time and for affordable alternatives to be available, including **the city’s infrastructure making it easy to source clean power from the grid.**

4. SHARING INFORMATION/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We support the commitment to a streamlined approach to ensure residents, community representatives and other interested parties are consulted about events and given an opportunity to feed back on them in planning stages.

Using a web platform and digital notifications to registered community groups of upcoming proposals could be a good way in many circumstances to increase early stage communication of potential plans, which is important for affected residents. **It will be important to ensure that processes are as light touch and streamlined as possible, consistent with the scale of proposal and capacity of different types of event organisers.**

In the case of recurring annual signature events such as the major festivals, we would ask that **CEC play a part in supporting a more systematic engagement with stakeholders. We endorse the Fringe Society's proposal for a reinforced EPOG process to consider major applications for using public space taking into account views of all stakeholders in advance**, and with a clear mechanism for impacted stakeholders to report issues with noise, after hours hospitality operations, litter/recycling and provision of security during event delivery.

The festivals are often approached by local residents and businesses who are keen to see more activity in their areas, asking about opportunities for events. So we see it as **important that the city supports ongoing placemaking conversations with communities**, as this can be more powerful than one-off consultations to hear from a wider range of voices including people who wouldn't necessarily speak up about a specific proposal. Having a better ongoing understanding of different residents' desire for a range of activities in their area could help provide a context for decisions where lengthy case by case debates could mean areas may miss out on opportunities if processes are overly time-consuming.

5. USE OF SPACES ACROSS THE CITY

This PSMP guideline reflects the situation that had developed during peak season prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, when rapid growth in city population, day and international visitors was leading to city centre pinch points at peak times where concentrated people flows need to be better managed.

The range of challenges and opportunities has grown and changed as the city emerges from the immediate pandemic and looks to adaptation and renewal. **The Public Spaces Management Plan of 2021 will urgently need to prioritise supporting the revival of city centre vitality and a return to employment growth, as well as targeting the ongoing aim of spreading the benefits of additional footfall across a wider area.** This context needs to be clearly reflected across the principles and guidelines.

Despite the immediate challenges for live festivals and events at all scales, they have a vital longer-term role in helping places to thrive by creating focal points and opportunities to come together for individuals, families, friends, communities and visitors. However, even beyond the period where additional public health distancing requirements are in place, audience behaviour may be different and smaller outdoor events may be more common for a time.

Some of the spaces covered in the **Area Conditions** section have limits set on the number of days of event usage across a 12-month period, based on previous patterns of demand and intensity, and it will continue to be vital to ensure a balance of uses of public space according to the needs and

preferences of different groups. The new challenge may become how to support enough activities that boost residents' quality of life and bring footfall to an area. **For the coming period, the PSMP should ensure that there is room for flexibility in decisions about extending the number of days of usage for smaller parts of public spaces, to enable individual events to take place at a lower intensity around the year where appropriate.**

The PSMP already mentions the need to take into account the economics of staging events and delivering community benefit in working with event organisers to identify viable opportunities. It will be **even more important to consider these economics in future as event organisation is much more fragile after the damage of what will be more than a year without significant live operations.** Events are only viable for any organiser where there is sufficient footfall, and so wider city planning may be able to build on the work of the Fringe Society with researchers and partners analysing data on ticket buyers and transport to inform approaches to spreading activity across the city.

For the festivals as charitable organisations, larger-scale performances, city centre events and ticket-buying audiences are also integral to their community benefit and this must be taken into account. They generate the income that provides the foundations for supporting community and learning programmes, attracting private and public supporters to enable citywide programmes that engaged over 90% of schools and 130 community groups in 2019.

For the objective of dispersal of events, there needs to be further consideration of what will make spaces fit for purpose and easy to use for organisers of all scales. **Consideration should be given to developing specific event areas where practical infrastructure - mains power, hard standing and good travel and transport provision - is already in place or can be developed.** A desire for dispersal requires resource, financial and otherwise, to make spaces suitable for event use, and there needs to be prior consultation to better understand what is required for users and organisers.

In some comments on the consultation to date, it has been suggested that revenue from events in specific areas should be ring-fenced for improvement of those areas. While this may well be a good principle in many cases, there also **needs to be flexibility for CEC to use revenue to take a citywide approach to develop new opportunities** – otherwise the income from the most popular locations could not be used to develop other sites or to support enabling infrastructure such as transport provision as part of a wider dispersal strategy.

On a related point, there are several comments on the consultation about the potential for commercial events to contribute to public good improvements. While the Festivals Edinburgh member festivals are all set up for not-for-profit benefits, so this point is relevant to a different segment of the events landscape, everyone interested in the development of the Festival City needs to keep in mind that **there can be a tension between expecting CEC to generate additional income and complaints that some events are over-commercialised.** The more that commercial events are asked to return additional fees to the Council for wider purposes, the more they need to monetise commercial opportunities such as hospitality, paid attractions and increased ticket prices. All events in public spaces should be supporting the public good, whether in cash or through contributing to the city's success and quality of life, and there needs to be balanced consideration of how that can best be achieved.

Looking at the desired outcome from a wider perspective – that any commercial enterprises (not just events) benefiting from the city's amenities should make a contribution to the quality of the public realm – it could help with this conundrum to look more broadly than the events sector and **consider how businesses across the city who benefit from the high quality of life offered by Edinburgh's lively culture, festivals and events scene can contribute to its upkeep and development.**

6. MANAGING ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS IN PUBLIC SPACES

As part of the architecture of planning the major annual cycle of festivals and events, a **standing festival city operations planning group is needed bringing together festivals, CEC officials and multi-agency specialists to map out the annual and perennial cycles needed to manage major events at this level of ambition.** This could include consideration of the issues raised by the Fringe Society for annual events in the same space each year, that there should be clear communication of any development work - including for utilities, data cabling and renovations.

Such a group can also contribute to vital **city planning for key aspects of city management that need to be in place to provide a high quality experience for residents and visitors** alike to enjoy major city festivals and events, such as:

- Pedestrianisation, security measures and high quality permanent traffic management measures that don't detract from the quality of the experience for people using city spaces
- Well trained street managers ensuring regulations are in place and being enacted
- Work with local businesses on access and delivery times
- Eco-, family-friendly and accessible facilities – including recycling, water, picnic stations, advice and resources for people with limited mobility.

7. APPLICATION PROCESS FOR ORGANISERS

We support the concept of a fully functioning web platform for applications for public space, a single point of entry approach to the application journey and the proposal to establish an Events & Filming office and team to process all applications.

The Events & Filming Office needs to have the resources and expertise to be a one-stop shop for potential organisers and to be able to co-ordinate planning effectively across the Council, similar to functions we have seen in place in other cultural capitals such as Montreal and London. This should take into account the need of smaller, community and volunteer-led organisers for support, as well as the need to sustain Edinburgh's world class standing for major festivals and events.

Streamlining the application process based on the scale of proposals is important to maximise opportunities for beneficial events to take place with minimum process. For large, recurring events a reinforced EPOG process and standing festival city operations planning group will be useful models as set out in our comments in previous sections. The Fringe Society also flags that CEC previously usefully played an active role in convening interested local groups to discuss plans for the peak summer festivals season and the festivals collectively endorse the value of such an approach.

The application process will involve a graduated degree of consultation and information sharing depending on the scale of event. In the case of the city's signature major festivals and events, this will need to balance appropriate scrutiny and transparency with keeping up the momentum needed for festivals and events to take place successfully, given the cost and time impacts of additional layers of governance. **Identifying aspects of the approvals process for recurring events that could be put in place long-term and not just on an annual basis will help provide the lead times and certainty needed for events and festivals to have the best chance of returning viably and sustainably to contribute to the city's recovery and renewal.**