



**Deputation to the City of Edinburgh
Culture & Communities Committee,
5 December 2024**

7.6. 'Public Spaces – Events Charging, including Parks Levy'

Summary: The Calton Hill Conservation Trust would like the Parks Levy to be used for the maintenance and the restoration of Calton Hill, rather than *“development improvements”*.

1. Introduction to Calton Hill Conservation Trust

We are a new organisation. Less than two years ago we formed an action group, then a 'Friends', and finally a Conservation Trust, registered as a SCIO with the Scottish Charity Regulator in August this year. We have more than 100 members.

2. Mission

The progressive deterioration of the hill from around 2008, as shown in aerial photographs (see references), as well as worsening litter and graffiti reached a low point in 2022 and we decided action was needed.

Our mission is to make the hill, *“cleaner, safer, and more beautiful”*.

3. Current issues

Current issues on the hill include:

1. Litter and litter bin problems, particularly in high wind,
2. Erosion, the loss of both grass and soil, on the top of the hill,
3. Uncontrolled access by private motor vehicles up Calton Hill Drive,

4. Blocked drainage and rainwater runoff channels and deterioration to path surfaces,
5. Broken stonework,
6. Lack of disabled access with no dedicated entry point for walkers and wheelers even on Calton Hill Drive,
7. Limited access to the public toilets (that do exist) in the Nelson Monument and the City Observatory,
8. Poor general signage and decayed, fading info boards.

4. Response by the Trust

The Trust have successfully done test re-turfing of four selected eroded areas, also restored a large part of the rainwater runoff channels with volunteer labour, and organised litter pickups, including accumulations, on inaccessible slopes. So far we have obtained three grants. We concentrate on restoration and conservation — not trying to create anything new.

5. Experience

Our experience suggests that the hill can be restored and maintained to a publicly-acceptable standard with modest funds, if there is attentive on-hand, on-site management, of the kind that the Trust can provide, and arguably CEC might find more challenging with limited staff time available for oversight of the hill.

6. Tourism and events

In our view, current levels of tourism, (perhaps half a million to a million visitors,) and events, (the Beltane Fire Festival and Dusherra and a few others), **should be** sustainable.

What is **not** sustainable is the continued free use of the hill by the tourist and events industry — who don't contribute to keeping the hill in a good condition, or pay for reinstatement. Event organisers, in particular, drive up heavy vehicles and leave equipment that damages the ground and contributes to erosion, while tour companies bring large groups that increase footfall.

The perception that the hill is a “semi-wild space”, that looks after itself despite all the pressure, is wrong. More than most public spaces Calton Hill needs a degree of care.

7. Park Levy

We welcome the Parks Levy as described in the report (Public Spaces – Events Charging, including Parks Levy, 5 December 2024) and including Calton Hill (4.2.3). although ideally we would like a threshold lower than £10 per ticket.

In particular — and this is the main reason for this deputation — we would like the money to be used for maintenance on Calton Hill, not limited to “*development improvements*” (4.6).

Consistent with this we note that, “*Current Assessment of improvement priorities for Calton Hill*” in Appendix 1 of the report, does *not* include restoration of the eroded areas of the hill — nor does it include any recognition of the erosion which all visitors notice immediately when they climb the hill for the first time.

8. ‘Improvement priorities’

The “*Current Assessment of improvement priorities for Calton Hill*” (Appendix 1 of the report) includes: “*path upgrades and drainage infrastructure improvements, signage upgrade, interpretative panel upgrade, provision of public water supply, provision of defibrillator, management of scrub planning, i.e. gorse management*”.

The first three items — “*path and drainage, signage, interpretative panels*” — are arguably maintenance issues. Paths are eroded, signage is degraded or missing and the info-boards have faded to being barely readable. These are real priorities and the Trust have applied for grants for them to be addressed.

Obviously the Trust would be pleased to see a water supply and defibrillator on the hill.

9. Biodiversity

The Trust hope the “*management of scrub planning, i.e. gorse management*” (Appendix 1 of the report) will be subject to the Biodiversity Management Plan (funded by Inspiring Scotland) that we are currently developing with specialist advisers.

The first part, the *Vegetation Survey of Calton Hill* has already been published online (see references) and shared with CEC — probably the most detailed survey of its kind ever done for an Edinburgh park. This should guide the protection of biodiversity on the hill.

References

1. *Erosion on Calton Hill: Including aerial photographs, 1996 to 2023* <<https://caltonhilltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Erosion-on-Calton-Hill-2023.pdf>>
2. *Vegetation Survey of Calton Hill, Edinburgh in October 2024, Ben Averis (November 2024)* <<https://caltonhilltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Calton-Hill-veg-survey-report-Ben-Averis-2024-11-07.pdf>>

Calton Hill Conservation Trust
Charity No. SC053572

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