



Calton Hill Conservation Trust AGM Draft Minutes

Saturday 17th May 2025 at 11 am

Scottish Chamber Orchestra, 4 Royal Terrace, Edinburgh

Attendees: Simon Holledge, Vikki Brooks, Susan Poupard, Simon Preston, Jim McCormack, Gerry Wells, Hartley Millar, Masumi Holledge, Cllr Joanna Mowat, Annick Gaillard, Cllr Finlay McFarlane, Clare Midgley, Jenny Bond, Alan McIntosh, Gillian Frayling-Kelly. *Apologies:* Mike Birch, Michael Osborne.

1. Minutes of the AGM on 18th May 2024

Proposed Jim McCormack; seconded Cllr McFarlane.

2. Chair's Report: *The ups and downs of an eventful year on the hill (Simon Holledge)*

On our website, we have a 'Timeline' which records 27 items during the past year, including four litter picks, nine volunteer days, eight walks, survey walks and tours, two formal deputations to the council, and one evening of online presentations — but not including our own board meetings and those with council officers. So we've been busy!

Charity status

At our AGM on 18 May 2024, we adopted a new name and a more detailed constitution. Stepping up to our new identity involved applying for Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation ('SCIO') status on 18 July, as well as registering a new domain name — CaltonHillTrust.org — and a new website etc.

Our application to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) was accepted on 15 August. On that date we became a SCIO with implications for our accounts. We now have a charity number SC053572 and we are required to attach this to all our notices and publications.

Membership and finance

We currently have 103 paid-up members. Each member pays £10 per year and we've also had donations and grants. Simon will have more details in his report later. We have asked our politician friends to support a proposal to give the Trust an annual grant similar to that given to the Water of Leith Conservation Trust. Ideally a sum of £30k per annum would enable us to scale up our operations. We hope this will be considered at the Council Culture & Communities Committee meeting on 5 June.

Projects

We have ongoing projects to make the hill — in the words of our mantra — 'cleaner, safer and more beautiful'.

Erosion and drainage

The major problem of the hill over the past 20 years has been erosion, the loss of both grass and soil.

In February 2024, we returned four small areas on the top of the hill with 160m² of standard turf with basically good results, although we've had to repeatedly rope off the areas to protect them.

On Thursday (15 May), we followed this with returning 120m² of barren ground in front of the National Monument. This time we used 'rhizomatous tall fescue' grass or RTF. This is a durable, dense, hard-wearing turf with underground stems called rhizomes, which allow the grass to spread and repair itself.

Linked to this, over the past year, we've also cleared a large part of the stone gutter rainwater runoff channel system and connected drains, with the help of volunteer groups. Our un-tarmacked paths and walks are much eroded and uncovering the channels is the first step towards looking at path improvements as well as making access easier for everybody.

Litter

Litter is a major concern linked to road access. Limiting vehicular access at night, and the operation of a Firework Control Zone in November, led to a noticeable reduction in un-binned waste, although we are now concerned that the extension of road opening times to 22.30 in the summer will bring back the fast food snackers.

Gerry Wells, our Litter and Bins Officer, has written a report on waste containers, which will be basis of talks with the council to provide better facilities for the hill.

Graffiti

We've achieved zero-graffiti. Occasionally there is new low-level tagging. We remove it.

Firework Control Zone

The Calton Hill Firework Control Zone was in operation from 1 to 10 November and was regarded as a success. We have re-applied for 2025. We understand this will again go to public consultation.

Biodiversity

The hill is a semi-natural space. We have a funded project to write a Biodiversity Management Plan to complement the general Management Plan published in 2018. We have already published a Vegetation Survey and hope to add information about mammals and invertebrates shortly.

Holyrood Park

Calton Hill is part of the Arthur's Seat Volcano Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). We share a lot of things with the rest of the site, not just geology, and expect to be working closely with Holyrood Park in the future.

Other projects

At the moment we are working on some new projects, including an exciting new one for archaeology, revamping the info-boards, and also some stone repair works to steps and walls.

Events

We have two major events a year — the Beltane and Dusherra — which we think are sustainable in terms of their impact on the hill. There have been minor issues with vehicles damaging the grass but we hope these can be dealt with in the future.

Beltane

Only the Beltane is a commercial ticketed event. This year there will be a Parks levy of £1 per £10-and-over ticket and the receipts should be ringfenced and used for a project on the hill. The sum raised should be more than £5,000. There is still no clear understanding about how this money will be spent and we are concerned about 'administrative costs' absorbing some of it.

New events?

Given the rich history of the hill — and the arguable (!) disinterest of the tourist industry in celebrating it. I hope the Trust can start putting on some events in our own right both to promote the hill and raise funds.

The birthday of William Henry Playfair — who designed half the monuments on the hill as well as all the streets around it — is on 15 July. And on 26 April we have the birthday of Agnes

'Nancy' Maclehose, the subject of Burns's famous poem '*Ae fond kiss*' who lived for thirty years in 16 Calton Hill. And there are others.

I'd also like to mention our Garden Party on June 14 which our Secretary, Vikki Brooks, will be talking about later.

Issues

We have a number of ongoing issues.

Calton Hill Drive Access Barrier

Members are aware of the problems of an open road going up the hill — in contradiction to council policies. We issued a public statement on 10 July last year asking for closure by 1 October. This didn't happen, though the council did finally agree to keeping the barrier closed in January 2025. Unfortunately the policy was reversed by senior officers — above the Parks level — at the end of February, following pressure from business interests.

The position remains that the access barrier should be closed to unauthorised vehicles, if and when the means to do this is agreed. The Trust have asked to be included in technical discussions, as we may have more practical experience of how entry systems work than the other parties involved.

Disabled access

Since our inception we've insisted that disabled access be factored into all projects for the hill — something that hasn't happen with the Collective or Nelson Monument. We worked with the Edinburgh Access Panel on disabled audits for toilets and the access barrier. We raised this at our formal meeting with the council at Waverley Court on 22 January and we continue to raise it.

Vandalism

We had a lot of litter in 2024, but almost no vandalism. Unfortunately this has changed. We've had reports of young boys getting together on the hill, moving bins around, turning them over, setting them alight and breaking glass bottles. The police now have an online report page which we've circulated in o newsletter and we encourage members to use it. We've discussed installing CCTV and may ask about this again.

Grounds Maintenance

Since May 2024, there have been a number of occasions when council work was done on the hill which we thought harmful or un-necessary.

We now know that in each case the work was done by the Grounds Maintenance Unit, an autonomous group which doesn't report to the Parks Officer.

We made a formal complaint to the council about the over-cutting of the grass in April — now escalated to ‘stage 2’ — and also written a detailed report about the removal of young trees and shrubs in March.

Besides the serious loss of natural habitat, this undermines our Inspiring Scotland-funded work to evaluate the wild life on the hill. Obviously it doesn’t make sense to record species for protection and then find they have been removed.

Nelson Monument

The Nelson Monument is being restored. We’ve asked for updates. In January it was announced that the time ball and mast would be reinstalled in April for re-opening in June, but these dates may have slipped. There are two public toilets by the entrance to the monument and we have asked for them to be made available to the public.

Deputations and meetings

To address these issues we made a written and spoken deputation to the council Culture & Communities Committee in December 2024, followed by a formal meeting with council officers in Waverley Court in January and another written and spoken deputation in February.

Media

We are in touch with all the major local media outlets both directly and through our Bluesky account which has 366 followers. We started it in November 2024, ending our use of twitter.

On our website, have 19 permanent pages, 121 news posts, and 312 media files and documents — so it is a considerable resource and archive — even if most people seem to go to Bluesky instead.

We also have a regular Mailchimp newsletter — sent out by Susan Poupard — now with about 150 subscribers.

Incidentally, we now have a logo flag and we will be getting armbands and Hi-Viz jackets to give members more prominence and help recruitment.

An altruistic organisation beset by commercial interests?

It is sometimes difficult to know how an altruistic organisation, where no-one is paid, can negotiate successfully with salary-earning employees and aggressively-defended vested interests.

In an ideal world, those who give up their time (for nothing) to do good things would be respected and listened to at least as much as those pursuing their self-interest.

But our experience is often the opposite — those who have a financial interest feel entitled to put that first, and are shocked by the idea of giving anything back for free to the community. That is something for us to ponder.

New team members?

Finally we are still looking for members interested in joining our active team. In particular, we would like to find someone who can act as a Schools Officer, working with primary and secondary schools and other youth organisations, also perhaps an Entertainment and Events Officer.

We would also like to attract more members to join our volunteers group.

3. Vice-Chair's Report: Funding Trust projects in 2024-2025 (Susan Poupard)

My report focuses on the projects we've been able to progress over the past year thanks to funding received - as well as support from volunteers and members.

We've received funding for a variety of projects including re-turfing, biodiversity surveys, and we're progressing on projects to update information boards and install an accessible defibrillator.

- **Re-turfing** - The University of Edinburgh awarded us a micro-grant (£446) in Oct 2024, for grass re-seeding, this was postponed in part due to temperatures not being suitable. After discussion with the council we agreed a revised plan to trial re-turfing an area of 60m² in front of the National Monument with RTF (harder-wearing) turf. The council parks department match-funded an additional 60m² of turf, doubling the area that we could cover. The turfing was carried out on Thurs 15 May by a team of volunteers from CHCT and Gleeds, together with park rangers. The results of the trial will inform future plans on re-turfing.
- **Biodiversity Management Plan** - Inspiring Scotland's Neighbourhood Ecosystem Fund awarded us £2,828 in Sept 2024, for surveys for a Biodiversity Management Plan; this is an area missing from the original Calton Hill Management Plan. The funding covers 3 surveys: a Vegetation Survey (completed by Ben Averis), a mammal survey (being carried out by Graeme Wilson of GW Ecology), and an invertebrate assessment (being carried out by Buglife). Ben Averis' field work was completed in October, and the Vegetation Survey published on our website in November. We think this may well be the most detailed botanical survey ever made in an Edinburgh park. Findings were discussed in our online meeting on biodiversity, held in February. Graeme Wilson led a bat walk event in April and mammal surveys are continuing during May and June. Buglife Scotland had done review of existing datasets followed by a walkover assessment. We will share the findings in due course.

- **Defibrillator** - A generous donation from The Galashan Trust has been offered towards a defibrillator that is accessible on the hill 24/7: the one in the Collective enclosure can't be accessed outwith Collective opening times. Discussions on this will be progressed with the council.
- **Information boards update** - Edinburgh World Heritage have indicated they can provide some funding and support for the much-needed update of information boards, which were installed in 2013. To be confirmed if we will be able to renew all 13 information boards; we'll prioritise those that are in the busiest spots and in worst condition.

In addition we have on funding application in progress:

- **Community Archaeology Project** - We've applied for £5K from the City Centre Community Grant Fund to deliver a community archaeology project to explore the heritage and archaeology of the hill, with the help of Headland Archaeology. The plan is for a series of workshops and activities, including carrying out a baseline photogrammetry survey of the hill, a walk and talk on the known history of the hill and archaeological potential, community workshops on walkover surveys, photogrammetry surveys, and creating a scope for a research strategy.

We're currently looking for funding for:

Path improvements - we have part-funding agreed from the Regent Gardens Association towards repairing the steps that lead towards the Regent Gardens path, but are seeking further funding for this in order to carry out this work.

Gazebo - we're also look for funding to provide a shelter for volunteers and event participants, to serve as a base for event organisers, and provide refreshments etc. This will help us to provide a more welcoming environment to recognise people's time and participation, and to provide a space for socialising and community interaction, particularly when the weather's not as pleasant as today.

Finally, a thank you - all the projects we've done can only be successful with the support of people and organisations that have not just provided funding but also supported us in many other ways. We've had many enthusiastic corporate and student volunteers who have helped on the hill over the past year, as well as our own dedicated volunteers, and committee, and support from our members. It's great to see so many people involved in helping maintain the hill and improve it for everyone. Thanks to everyone for your support over the past year.

4. Treasurer's Report: Consideration of the accounts (Simon Preston)

Introduction

The accounts of the Friends of Calton Hill, known as the Calton Hill Conservation Trust from 18 May 2024, were originally according to the calendar year, in other words from 1 January to 31 December. On 15 August 2024, the Trust were registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) and the financial year was changed to 1 April to 31 March.

For that reason, the accounts were divided into the period 1 January to 14 August 2024, and 15 August 2024 to 31 March 2025.

The accounts for 1 January to 14 August 2024 were signed off as correct by our independent examiner, James Madden, on 23 April 2025.

Financial Report

What follows is the financial report for the Calton Hill Conservation Trust for our first operational period as a registered charity beginning 15 August 2024 and ending 31 March 2025.

These accounts have not yet been independently verified ready for submission to OSCR, that is in progress.

Overview of Accounts

Our accounts have been prepared on a receipts and payments basis, in line with OSCR guidance for small charities. They show both restricted and unrestricted funds and provide a clear picture of the Trust's financial activity during our first operational period.

- Total income: £4,107.38
- Total expenditure: £1,132.71
- Net movement in funds: £2,974.67
- Closing bank balance at 31 March 2025: £3,606.39

Income Breakdown

- Grants: £3,274.00

£2,828 from Inspiring Scotland

£446 from the University of Edinburgh

(Both restricted for specific project purposes)

- Membership Fees: £715.45

These were collected mainly via SumUp, net of SumUp fees

- Donations: £110.00
- Events Income: £7.93

Received through Eventbrite.

All income was paid into our bank account and verified against our records.

Expenditure Breakdown

Our total spending for the year was £1,132.71. This includes:

- Project Costs: £650.00 (restricted): Ben Averis
- Marketing & Promotion: £73.58: website costs
- Subscriptions & Services: £15.59: online services

- Direct Activity Costs: £250.39: expenses linked directly to running community activities and volunteer engagement
- Insurance: £143.15: to ensure appropriate cover for public engagement and volunteer safety.

All payments were made via bank transfer or company debit card and are reflected in our year-end statement.

Restricted vs Unrestricted Funds

- Restricted funds are tied to specific purposes set by funders. As of 31 March, we had £2,743.84 in restricted funds remaining.
- Unrestricted funds are available to support the Trust's general operation and future resilience. We closed the year with £862.55 in unrestricted reserves.

Bank Position

We opened the financial period with £631.72 and ended with £3,606.39, reflecting our success in securing grants and community support, alongside a well-managed level of spending.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year, we intend to:

- Use remaining restricted funds to deliver further planned activities.
- Explore new sources of funding to grow our reach and impact.
- Increase membership and donation income.
- Build a stable base of unrestricted funds to support core costs and long-term planning.

Thanks to our funders, members, supporters, and Board for making this first year a success.

N.B. Relevant financial reports will be made available on the <https://caltonhilltrust.org> website in due course.

5. Secretary's Report: Social events including the Members Garden Party on Saturday 14th June (Vikki Brooks)

Vikki Brooks (Secretary) promoted and encouraged members to attend the forthcoming garden party at Greenside Church on Saturday 14th June. Invitations and payment instructions to be issued. She also welcomed ideas and suggestions from members for future events.

6. Retiring Trustees

As required by the constitution, the following trustees were retiring: Vikki Brooks, Simon Holledge, James McCormack and Hartley Millar. All were standing for re-election, and this was agreed by the meeting.

7. Resolution to alter the Constitution to correct an error

Regarding Clause 50 (ending) “...*They shall be eligible for re-election under clause 48 or appointment under clause 49*” this should read: “...*They shall be eligible for re-election under clause 52 or appointment under clause 53*”.

Proposed Hartley Millar; seconded Gerry Wells.

8. Any other business

- Clare Midgley asked whether the text was to be updated when the info-boards are refurbished. Susan Poupard explained that this was likely and that a working group or panel was to be established. Clare expressed interest in being involved.
- Cllr McFarlane mentioned future provision of a top-up water tap. There was a water source near the Nelson Monument. It was hoped that this facility would discourage single-use drink bottles and reduce litter. The new defibrillator was also noted.
- Alan McIntosh asked whether the removal of stickers from lamp posts/signs could be prioritised. Methods were discussed. Cllr Mowat proposed a possible council ‘blitz’, to include a council team alongside volunteers.
- Simon Holledge mentioned Jacob’s Ladder as an exception to the successful removal of graffiti on the wider hill.
- Gillian Frayling-Kelly (Girl guiding Leader, Greenside Church) was interested in working collaboratively for CHCT and schools and youth organisations. It was agreed to meet later and discuss this further.
- Annick Gaillard asked about vegetation on Calton Hill where there was a fire in 2022. Simon Holledge explained it was a gorse fire and had recovered naturally afterwards. Susan Poupard noted that people had scattered some ‘wild flower’ seeds there.

Meeting finished 12.10 p.m.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Income and expenditure account for the period starting 1 January 2024 and ending 14 August 2024

Appendix 2. Income and expenditure account for the period starting 15 August 2024 and ending 31 March 2025

FRIENDS OF CALTON HILL
 INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
 FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 14 AUGUST 2024

Category	Restricted		Unrestricted		Total Income £	Total Expenses £
	Income £	Expenses £	Income £	Expenses £		
Membership Fees			463.98	10.00	463.98	10.00
Subscriptions				31.18		31.18
Marketing and Promotion				85.83		85.83
Administration				143.00		143.00
Direct Activity Costs				390.86		390.86
Project Costs		3,868.16				3,868.16
Grand Total		3,868.16	463.98	660.87	463.98	4,529.03
	Movement	(3,868.16)	Movement	(196.89)	Movement	(4,065.05)

GRANTS RECEIVED

	Grants £
(CEC received 2023)	3,988.00
Grand Total	3,988.00

BALANCE SHEET

	Restricted £	Unrestricted £	Total £
Opening Bank Balance at 01 January 2024	3,988.00	708.77	4,696.77
Movement in Funds	(3,868.16)	(196.89)	(4,065.05)
Closing Bank Balance at 14 August 2024	119.84	511.88	631.72

CALTON HILL CONSERVATION TRUST
 INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
 FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

Category	Restricted		Unrestricted		Total Income £	Total Expenses £
	Income £	Expenses £	Income £	Expenses £		
Grants	3,274.00				3,274.00	
Membership Fees			715.45		715.45	
Donations			110.00		110.00	
Events			7.93		7.93	
Marketing and Promotion				(73.58)		(73.58)
Project Costs		(650.00)				(650.00)
Subscriptions				(15.59)		(15.59)
Direct Activity Costs				(250.39)		(250.39)
Insurance				(143.15)		(143.15)
Grand Total	3,274.00	(650.00)	833.38	(482.71)	4,107.38	(1,132.71)
	Movement	2,624.00	Movement	350.67	Movement	2,974.67

GRANTS RECEIVED

	Grants £
Inspiring Scotland	2,828.00
University of Edinburgh	446.00
Grand Total	3,274.00

BALANCE SHEET

	Restricted £	Unrestricted £	Total £
Opening Bank Balance at 15 August 2024	119.84	511.88	631.72
Movement in Funds	2,624.00	350.67	2,974.67
Closing Bank Balance at 31 March 2025	2,743.84	862.55	3,606.39



Vikki Brooks,
Secretary, Calton Hill Conservation Trust
Charity No. SC053572
website: <https://caltonhilltrust.org>
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17th May, 2025