



Calton Hill Conservation Trust
Special Members' Meeting
Saturday, 1st November 2025, 14.00
Scottish Chamber Orchestra, 4 Royal Terrace EH7 5AB

Draft Minutes

Attendees: Simon Holledge (Chair), Susan Poupard (Vice-Chair), Vikki Brooks (Secretary), Gillian Frayling-Kelly, Adrian Laird Craig, Billie Dunmore, Annick Gaillard, Alan McIntosh, Hartley Millar, Carol Nimmo.

Apologies: Simon Preston (Treasurer), Adda Gogoris, David Hoy, Gerry Wells, Jim McCormack.

1. Introduction

Simon Holledge (Chair) updated members on recent media and public interest in the work of CHCT, especially surrounding the declared 'Erosion Emergency', and flagged policy objective proposals (see item 2). He also shared a series of biodiversity maps recently presented at an Edinburgh Green Spaces Forum meeting.

2. Proposal to adopt Six Policy Objectives to guide the Trust

Six proposed policy objectives were presented to members by Simon Holledge (chair) as follows:

2.1. Support sustainable visitor access that protects the hill's unique character and heritage, and ensures it remains an attractive and rewarding destination, both for the sake of the hill itself and the wider tourism economy.

2.2. Restore the physical condition of the hill and maintain it in a good state.

2.3. Improve on-site information for both locals and visitors.

2.4. *Make the hill more accessible to all including the less abled.*

2.5. *Protect the hill as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, so we have a more beautiful natural environment with better quality and variety of wildlife, based on the encouragement of native species of flora and fauna.*

2.6. *Establish a nature reserve on the western side of the hill.*

The proposed Six Policy Objectives would reinforce and supplement Clause 6 (Purposes) in the constitution:

6.1. *To promote and encourage the conservation, preservation, protection and improvement of the area known as Calton Hill, Edinburgh....* 6.2. *To inform the public of the significance of the area, its history and environment, and its future sustainability, with the intention of encouraging a responsible attitude towards the area's amenity and attractions;* 6.3. *To promote and encourage enjoyment and a responsible use of the area by a wide range of people and organisations, including those who live and work in the locality*

There was discussion regarding the proposed nature reserve and what it might look like. Simon Holledge referred to the publication by Scottish Natural heritage (now NatureScot) entitled 'Local Nature Reserves in Scotland'. It was suggested that nearby offices such as Baillie Gifford might be willing to support this.

Decision: the policy objectives were unanimously accepted by members with numbers 2 and 4 edited to read:

2. *Combat physical degradation of the hill and advocate for its good upkeep and maintenance*

4. *Make the hill more accessible to all.*

The six policy objectives to be included in new Standing Orders to be published immediately following the meeting.

3. Erosion Emergency

Simon Holledge (chair) made a report on the Erosion Emergency as follows:

The Erosion Emergency was declared on 12 September and 14 news outlets responded by publishing stories. The Trust made a deputation to the CEC Culture and Communities Committee on 2 October and a motion was passed by all parties broadly accepting the Trust's view of the erosion, but not the urgency of the emergency. The Parks Levy on the

Beltane Festival at the end of April had raised £6k but this was not made available for combatting erosion as hoped.

The Trust then ordered some 120 square metres of turf — paid for by the Trust — to demonstrate the seriousness of the emergency and the importance of not agreeing to another year of inaction. Fortunately Café Calton and then the Collective had offered their support and we were able to increase the turf order to 240 square metres. Subsequently the Parks Dept agree to support the community action by rotavating the compacted ground and bringing in top soil. The turf would be delivered on Wednesday 12 November and we are asking for volunteers to help lay the turf.

There were some questions and further discussion by members regarding returfing and fencing.

4. Proposed increase in membership fees

Susan Poupard (Vice-Chair) presented the following written report on behalf of Simon Preston (Treasurer):

Background: The current annual membership fee for the Calton Hill Conservation Trust (CHCT) is £10 per person, set when the organisation was founded as the Friends of Calton Hill in early 2023.

Since then, CHCT has developed rapidly into a formally constituted charity with an ambitious programme of conservation and public engagement. In partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council, Inspiring Scotland, Edinburgh World Heritage, Edinburgh University and others, we have delivered walks, talks, volunteer days and heritage, archaeology and biodiversity projects.

Most project costs are met by external grants. Membership income covers our core running costs – website, communications, marketing, insurance, equipment and volunteer expenses – and provides the flexible funds to seize new opportunities.

Why the fee needs to change:

- 1. The fee has not changed since 2023
£10 was suitable when we were new and informal. With a stronger public profile, higher standards and a wider range of activities, our running costs have grown and will continue to grow.*
- 2. We need a firmer base for running costs
Grants fund projects, not operations – items like improved branding and signage, volunteer tools, insurance and publicity. A modest increase would let CHCT become better resourced and more visible, making our charitable work more effective.*
- 3. Our events rely on experts who currently work for free
Our walks and talks are led by professional geologists, ecologists, historians or architects. We would like to offer small honoraria or travel expenses as a matter of fairness and professionalism.*

4. *Collecting £10 is time-consuming*
Processing small payments, reminders and renewals takes considerable volunteer time. A higher fee simplifies administration and makes each transaction efficient
5. *The benefits clearly outweigh the cost*
Members enjoy a year-round programme of free walks, talks and volunteering, which we would intend to maintain. Comparable experiences elsewhere often cost £5–£10 per event. Attending only a few activities easily justifies the proposed £25 fee.
6. *People value what they pay for*
Research by the MemberWise Network and NCVO shows that higher fees can increase perceived value and engagement: “members associate fee levels with organisational credibility and benefit.” Charging more encourages members to see their subscription as genuine support for a valued cause.
7. *Membership losses after increases are usually small*
MemberWise benchmarking (2022) found that organisations typically lose under 10% of members after moderate rises, especially when the reasons are explained clearly. Numbers often recover within a year.
8. *Flexibility to respond to opportunities*
Unrestricted income lets us act quickly – matching a grant, supporting a partner project or commissioning expert input – which is increasingly important as we work with funders and the Council.

Benchmarking

Comparable organisations charge substantially higher fees for similar benefits:

Organisation	Fee (individual)	Summary of benefits
Water of Leith Conservation Trust	£36	Guided walks, talks, newsletters, supports river conservation
Glasgow City Heritage Trust – Friends	£35	Free entry to talks, members-only events, shop discounts
Old Edinburgh Club	£30	Annual journal, talks, visits
Edinburgh World Heritage – Friends	£30	Priority invites to lectures/tours, supports conservation
Cockburn Association	from £25	Civic campaigns, lectures, Doors Open Day
Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland	£45	Lectures, casework news, heritage events
Scottish Wildlife Trust	£48	Magazine, events, reserves, supports wildlife programmes

These organisations operate at a similar or slightly larger scale, with similar membership benefits (talks, walks, publications, involvement in conservation).

A CHCT fee of £25 per person would remain below most peers, while signalling that we are a credible and established conservation charity.

Possible impacts

- *Some members may not wish to renew at the higher rate. Evidence from other organisations suggests that losses are usually small and short-term.*
- *To reduce barriers, we could introduce a "Supporter" rate of £15 (for those on low incomes) and a new Household Membership at £35, recognising that many members join as couples or households.*
- *We will make clear that fees directly support the running of CHCT and enable us to continue offering most events free of charge.*

Recommendation

- *That members approve an increase in the annual membership fee from £10 to £25, with a Household Membership at £35 and a Low Income Supporters' Rate of £15 effective from Date tbc (or at next renewal).*

Calton Hill Conservation Trust, 1 November 2025

Decision: it was unanimously agreed by members that the base fee for membership would increase to £25 at a date to be determined. A lower 'concessionary' membership of £15 and a 'household' membership of £35 will also be offered. Consideration of corporate membership and/or sponsorship opportunities were to be explored further.

The new fees to be included in new Standing Orders to be published immediately following the meeting.

5. Access barrier and disabled access issues

Susan Poupard (Vice-Chair) explained that CHCT was seeking a permanent, automated solution. Ideally this would be a one-way system with an automated barrier with a segregated walkway for walkers and wheelers. There are ongoing discussions with Edinburgh Council. Parks have undertaken to include CHCT in relevant future technical discussions. Since February the gate has been closed in the evenings. Last update from the Council was received on 21st October. The Parks Officer is working with chosen suppliers but has experienced delays. Need for clear timescales.

It was suggested that the council might charge modest fees for tour access (as cemeteries do). Toilet provision, including problems with portaloos and a better permanent solution, was discussed.

6. Open discussion (any other business)

- Susan Poupard (Vice-Chair) spoke about the Archaeology Project and photogrammetry survey.
- Adrian Laird Craig raised health and safety issues, particularly regarding climbing on the National Monument. This has insurance implications. Question of a health and safety survey. There was acknowledgement of the National Monument as a war memorial.
- General discussion around signage.
- Question of potential badged security guards raised.
- Francis Galashan donated funds for a defibrillator but it has not yet been possible to gain agreement of the Council to instal it at an appropriate location.
- Gillian Frayling-Kelly suggested raising issues around inclusion to escalate matters with the Council.

Meeting concluded 15.45

Vikki Brooks, Secretary
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8th November, 2025