

## **Lost Turf: Report on Calton Hill Re-grassing, May 2025 to January 2026**

On 5 May 2025, new turf was laid in front of the National Monument, in a test area that had been completely barren and eroded.

Following ground preparation with rotavation, removal of stones and the spreading of screened top soil brought to the hill by truck, volunteers and park rangers laid 120 square metres of turf in a 30m by 4m rectangle, with an equal surrounding area reseeded with rye grass seed.

We used rhizomatous tall fescue (RTF), a durable, dense, hard-wearing turf with underground stems called rhizomes, that allow the grass to spread and repair itself.

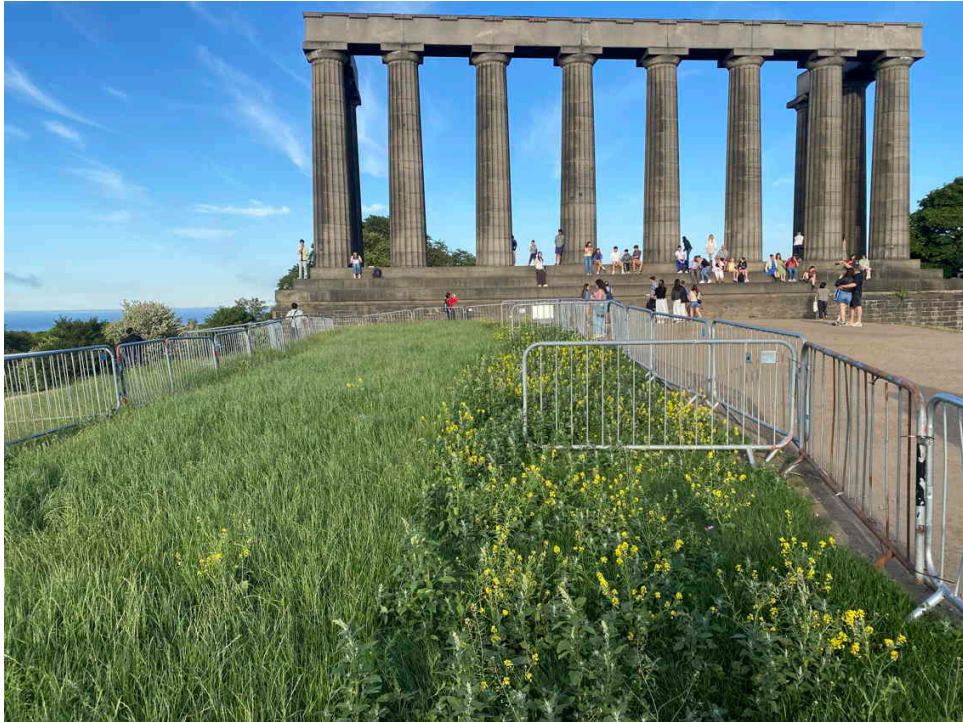
The re-turfing was financed jointly by the Calton Hill Conservation Trust (funded by a micro-grant from the University of Edinburgh) and the City of Edinburgh Council.



*Photo 1: Returfed strip surrounded by the area of reseeded, 5 May 2025*

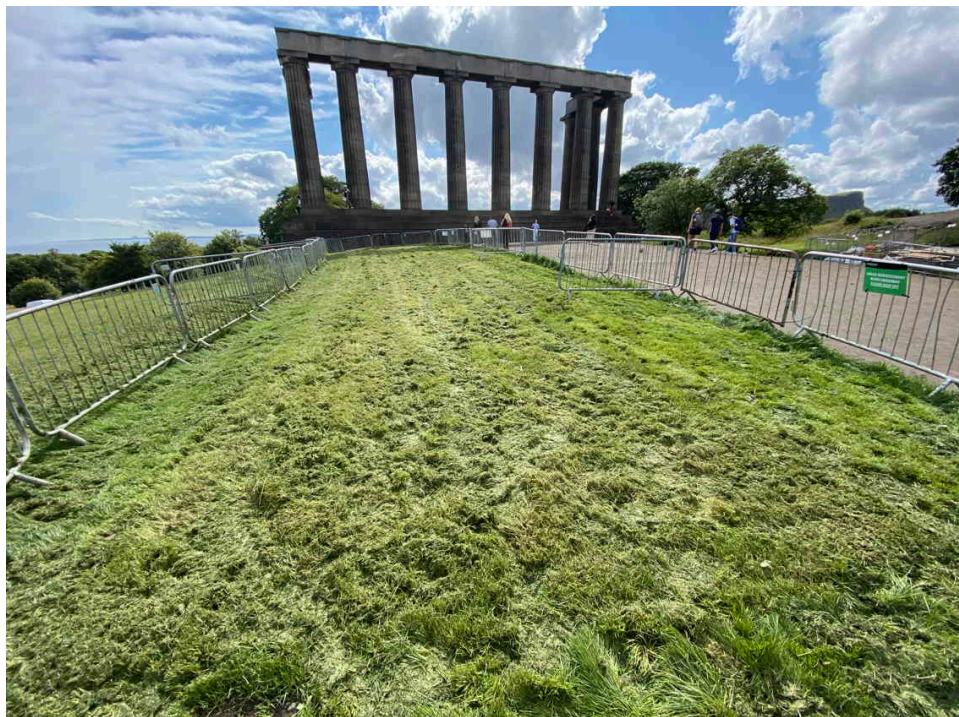
*Calton Hill grass re-turfing and re-seeding, May 2025 to January 2026*

The summer of 2025 was hot and dry. There are no sprinklers on the hill and water was periodically brought up by bowser truck. Nevertheless the turf — and to a surprising extent the re-seeding flourished. By July, the grass had grown to 40 to 45 centimetres (cm) in height.



*Photo 2: Returfed and reseeded area, 12 July 2025*

On 21 July, the grass was cut. We hoped the Council would follow normal practice, and cut only one third of the grass (the 'one-third rule'), leaving around 30 cm. Unfortunately the mowers cut the returfed grass to a height of around 5 cm or less — removing 85% of the growth and in some places ripping the turf below the surface.



*Photo 3: Returfed and reseeded area after cutting on 21 July 2025*

Nevertheless the grass gradually recovered and began to grow back.



*Photo 4 and 5: 28 August and 9 September 2025*

On 1 October 2025, the 'crowd control' fencing was removed.



*Photo 6: Returfed and reseeded area after removal of fencing, 1 October 2025*

Unfortunately during the autumn, there was rapid and accelerated deterioration in the condition of the turf as a result of increased footfall. The Samhuinn event on 31 October saw particular damage.



Photo 7 and 8: Around the re-turfed area following the Samhuinn, 4 November 2025

Our re-turfing of a further 300 m<sup>2</sup> of turf on the south side of the monument in November 2025, also increased the concentration on footfall on the central and northern sections immediately in front of it.

We are aware that other major heritage monuments, such as Stonehenge, have a rolling programme of resting (roping off) areas of grass to allow it to recover. This approach has been agreed with the council in principle but so far not implemented.

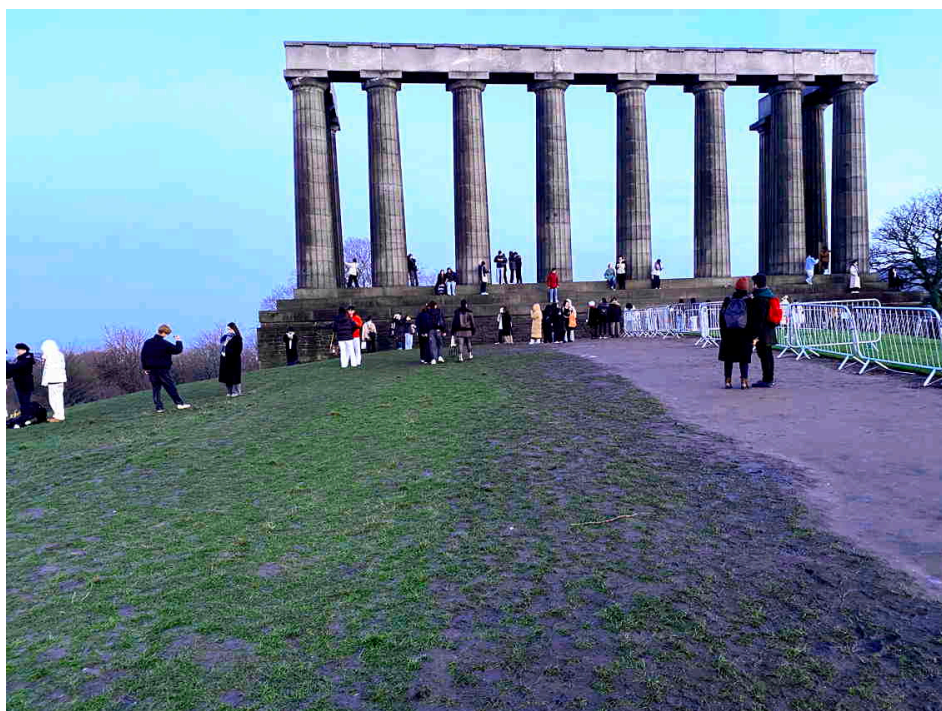
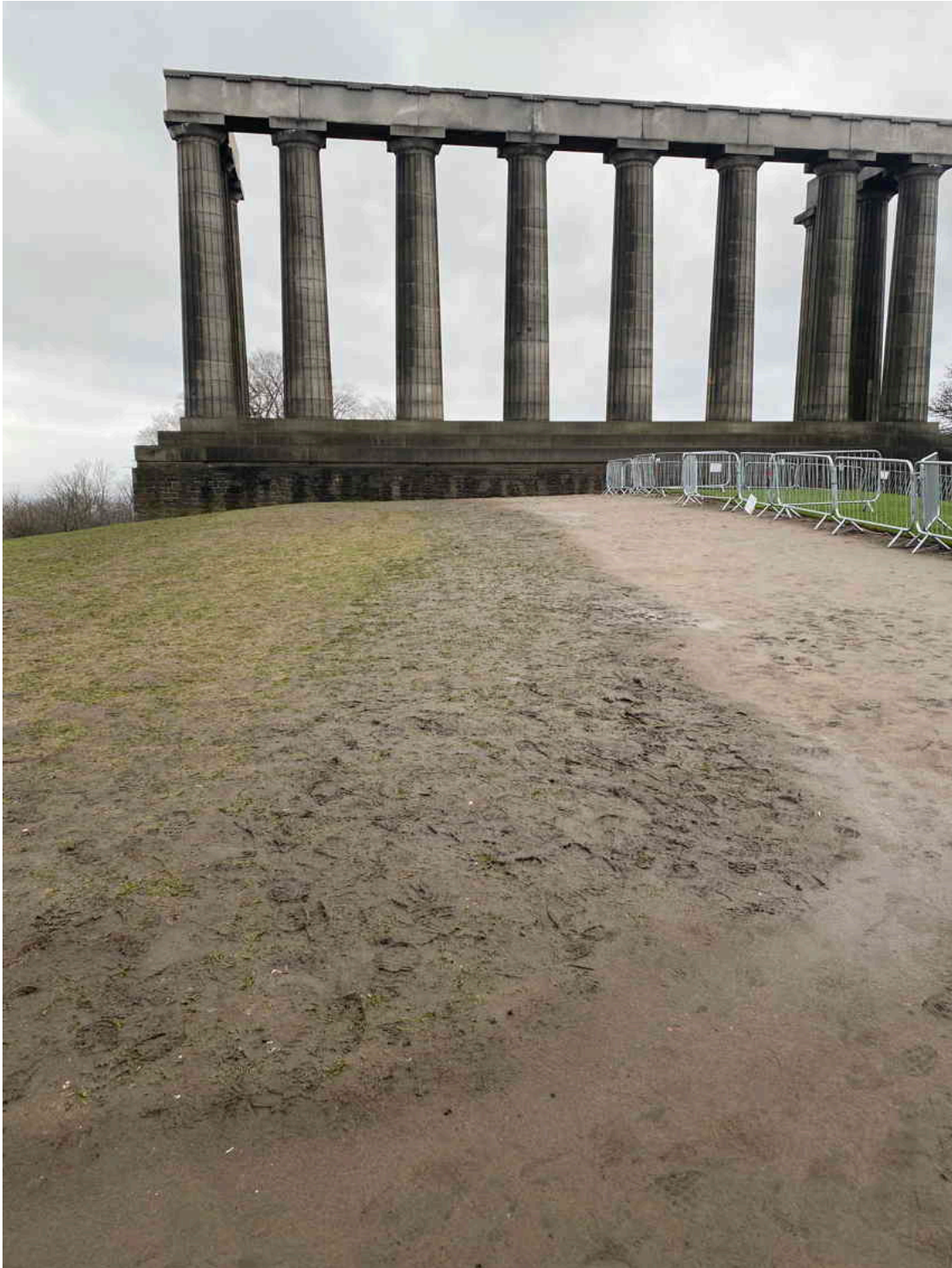


Photo 9: Progressive deterioration, 22 December 2025

For some months, the Trust were in discussions with the council about options for rapidly deployable temporary fencing or roping. Regrettably we weren't able to come up with an agreed solution in time to save the May 2025 turf. Officers were concerned that anything fixed in the ground with a metal spike could potentially be used as a weapon.



*Photo 10: Highly-stressed rectangle in front of the National Monument, perhaps as the result of an event? 22 December 2025*



*Photo 11: Returfed and reseeded area, 23 January 2026*

Both the re-turfing and the area reseeded were declared un-recoverable on 30 January. No measures are believed possible to revive them.

The further test area of 300 square metres of RTF returfing laid in November 2025 on the south section in front of the National Monument remains in good condition, protected by 'crowd control' fencing.

CHCT 2 February 2026