

## **EVENTS ON THE MEADOWS**

### **a view from Friends of the Meadows & Bruntsfield Links**

**We should like to make the following main points:**

- 1. Events on the Meadows should not last longer than 15 days**
- 2. A market rent should be charged for commercial events, and the revenue used to extend Park Rangers' hours**

For the present purpose we need to concentrate on the viability of this site for events lasting over a month, particularly when one event follows another and cumulative damage is done. At the moment, the Meadows is the only Edinburgh park where events are allowed on grass for more than 15 days. This is with the exception of Princes Street Gardens, which is a special case, and where there is full reinstatement of the terrain after the Winter Festival.

The Friends have long argued that large events on the Meadows should be restricted in view of the huge damage they cause to the ground, often rendering it unusable for sporting activities for months afterwards. The Meadows, on the site of the former Borough Loch, has a fragile clay substructure which is easily damaged by heavy plant. Work on the drainage was completed in 2003, but has recently had to be redone, since the damage inflicted on the surface had penetrated to lower levels. This work has cost over £100,000 in the current year. However, this work will have been done in vain if the surface is again abused by the erection of huge and heavy structures. Indeed, the recently seeded grass will hardly have had a chance to become established before the event already booked for this year is scheduled to take place.

The Friends suggest that, in line with other Edinburgh parks, events on grass should not last longer than 15 days, including set up and take down, and that longer events should only be allowed on hard standing sites in other parts of the city. Incidentally, a regular commercial show on the Meadows uses hard standing sites or theatres in most other cities: this is far more appropriate. Also, local caravan parks (for instance, Mortonhall) insist that campers pitching tents or parking caravans on grass move on after only one week.

Another recent consultation asked for comments on how the Council could save money and spend it. The Friends have learned that the fee for large commercial events on the Meadows is only £450 a night, which they think can hardly reflect market values. A local theatre charges over £3000, and it costs £2000 a day to hire Bristo Square during the Festival. At the same time we now learn from the Evening News of 21 March that the Council are charging community festivals astronomical rates for Public Entertainment Licence Fees ('Costs could soar to £7k and put future festivals at risk'). As the Editor says, community galas 'are the glue that holds communities together'. There seems to be an inconsistency here.

The Friends suggest that an economic rent should be charged for commercial events, and the revenue used for extra Park Ranger cover during the summer months. At the moment Park Rangers' hours finish at 6.30 p.m. Monday-Friday and 4.00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, when they are most needed to restrain anti-social behaviour including excessive drinking and public urination, and ensure adherence to the Park Rules, including preventing damage to the grass from barbecues. If a large commercial event lasting 15 days were charged no more than £1500 per night (i.e. £22,500 in all), this could well fund the staffing shortfall over the summer months.

Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links have consulted their members, and also the relevant community councils - Tollcross, Marchmont & Sciennes, and Merchiston, as well as the Southside Association, and all support this request. We earnestly beg all Councillors to join us in supporting it as well.

In our response to the consultation on the Events Manifesto we also asked that we should be given longer to respond to requests for comments on applications for events in the parks. As it happens I was on holiday when the request for comments on a commercial application came through last September, and so I was unable to reply. Members of Friends Groups are volunteers, without paid staff. However, others in the vicinity did respond, particularly from neighbouring community councils. The points they make include objections to the nature of the entertainment, the long-lasting damage to the grass, the absurdly low rent charged, the advisability of using a hard standing, and the unbearable noise and litter generated.

The Transport and Environment Committee has just endorsed a paper on the Edinburgh Living Landscape Programme that proposed 'visually attractive green areas for play, recreation, exploration and education'. It is also committed to 'involving neighbourhoods and communities in local decision-making'. The Council says in its current leaflet about 'Responsible Barbecue Use' that it is 'committed to improving our recreational open space', and on the accompanying map the area used for events on the Meadows is labelled 'Recreational Area'.

To conclude, we all enjoy the buzz of the Festival Fringe, but we also bear responsibility for preserving our beautiful Meadows for future generations. Events must be accommodated on suitable sites, and 15 days is quite long enough for those on grass, if serious damage is to be avoided. I plead with this committee to put an end for good to any events on the Meadows that last longer than 15 days, and to charge an economic rent for events that are allowed, using the revenue to extend Park Rangers' hours during the summer.

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