

Deputation to the T & E Committee, 30 August 2016

Thank you for seeing us today. I am accompanied by Joe Boyle, who has been building links between the Edinburgh student housing co-operative and Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links. He is Joint Co-ordinator for Voluntary Work on the Meadows, and a 4th-year student of environmental science at Edinburgh University. We have come here to re-state our case for implementing the decision made by this committee in August 2014 with regard to events on the Meadows, which was:

'The Council will expect an increased financial return on use of this space, and will invest any additional income secured into the infrastructure, features and facilities of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links.' (Para. 3.49 (c) of the Events Manifesto)

In fact it was due to our own efforts and campaigning that something more like a market rent is now charged for events on the Meadows, owing to the adoption of the bidding process, which has certainly been a great improvement.

However, we only learned last Thursday at the full Council meeting, in a reply to a question from Cllr Main, that the Council has in fact invested 'additional income into the infrastructure, features and facilities of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links', though we were not consulted about how the money was to be spent. We were told at a meeting of the Friends of Parks on 27 July that some of the money had gone into tree planting, but we were not asked about specimen of tree or planting location, and we notice that several young trees have already died for lack of maintenance. Other projects listed in the reply to Cllr Main seem to be a mixture of capital and revenue expenditure, and some were certainly funded from other sources, for instance the Boroughloch Walk Cycle Path Upgrade, a Sustrans project, and we feel that £27,500 on wall repairs should surely have come from a capital fund. Further projects such as £1500 on a new notice board in Leamington Walk have not yet been completed. This list certainly needs further scrutiny.

In addition, there are many projects of ours that need funding, for example, information boards on our proposed Heritage Trail, equipment for two toddler playgrounds, and a multi-gym. But perhaps the most important need is for a public toilet accessible to disabled people in the middle of the Meadows. This needs urgent working on together with the Council.

What we also need desperately during summer months, and especially during the Festival, is additional Park Ranger cover, to control anti-social behaviour and the lighting of instant barbecues directly on to the grass, which has created hundreds of burnt patches already this year. This we cannot fund ourselves, and voluntary work cannot fill the gap.

With the creation of the new Localities, the Meadows is now included with Princes Street Gardens in the South-East locality, with Mike Shields as Parks and Greenspace Officer, and 6 Park Rangers under his management, although the Meadows and Links as such are in fact losing one Ranger. We suggest that in the future some of these Rangers could help out in the Meadows during summer evenings. The job of locking up Princes Street Gardens could be done by a security firm, using some of the revenue

from Festival events in Princes St Gardens, so releasing the Rangers for tasks more suitable for their skills. This is just one idea: another could be that event money pays for some overtime for Park Rangers on sunny evenings. It is noted that £4,826 was spent on overtime for Park Rangers during August according to the answer to Cllr Main - was this in 2015? And will this money be spent again? And how many hours does this cover?

We wish to be treated the same as the other Edinburgh parks, and have no events lasting longer than 15 days on grass. This recommendation came from the Council's 2014 consultation, in which 88 people specifically referenced the Meadows. Of these, 75 considered four weeks too long for events. This year's consultation confirmed, with a 60:40 majority, that residents want events to be shorter. After 15 days the grass would have a chance to recover without being re-seeded. For large events lasting a month a suitable hard standing or brownfield site should be found.

The Meadows cannot withstand the current traffic from heavy vehicles: the track marks from last year were still visible when this year's event arrived. The drainage of this site was renewed yet again in 2014 at a cost of over £100,000. The park needs to be cared for and treasured for public recreation, not damaged by large commercial events.

FOMBL members work very hard to help to maintain the Meadows and Links, giving about 500 hours of voluntary work a year, in addition to the work we undertake with children from local schools. However, the Meadows and Links are two separate premier parks, totalling 95 acres: one and two-thirds the size of Princes Street Gardens. This should be recognized in the allocation of resources, and with the abolition of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links Advisory Group, we have additional responsibilities. We must now make sure that the voices of the four local community councils, as well as the Southside Association, are heard in matters to do with the Meadows and Links, and we value their support. But we look to the Council to fund and carry out the work that we can't ourselves take on, such as patrolling and supervision. These are the jobs of Park Rangers, and we must all work together if we are to maintain and improve our wonderful Meadows and Bruntsfield Links.

To conclude, it's good that a reasonable rent is now being charged for commercial events on the Meadows. We make an urgent plea for events to be no more than 15 days in length, for more Park Rangers to be deployed to control anti-social behaviour on summer evenings, for Princes Street Gardens to be locked up at night by a security firm, and for 'events' money to be ploughed back into the maintenance and facilities of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links. We ask too that Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links are regularly consulted with regard to improvements to the infrastructure, features and facilities of these two wonderful premier parks.

As the Events Manifesto of 2014, para 8.1 states: 'There is a need to balance the requirements of event operators with the wishes of local communities and park user groups to ensure appropriate rights of access to open space and a quality park environment.' **We rely on you to make sure that this is implemented.**

Thank you very much.