

COUNCIL: 21 SEPTEMBER 2023

CULTURE, PARKS & EVENTS STATEMENT

St David's Hall

Members will be aware that, following recent changes to advice on Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in public buildings issued by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Council took the disappointing decision to temporarily close St David's Hall to undertake additional checks on the RAAC panels in the building.

The Council has been consistently clear on the need for investment in St David's Hall to secure its long-term future and this has included addressing the RAAC and other maintenance issues, all of which was confirmed in the report that was considered by the Cabinet in December last year.

We have been aware of RAAC in St David's Hall and the need to manage it from a health and safety viewpoint since 2021 and have always followed government guidelines and advice to ensure the safety of the building. This has included the implementation of a building management and health & safety strategy for the past 18 months, which included regular inspections by independent structural engineers with specific RAAC expertise.

Throughout this time, no issues were raised about the condition of RAAC in the building and there was no evidence of deterioration – and this remains the case. However, the Council has continued to engage with its insurers and expert structural engineers and based on advice received from those experts, we believe that it is prudent and responsible to carry out intrusive surveys to further reassure ourselves and the public on the safety of the venue.

Consequently, we will be bringing structural engineers – who are RAAC experts – back onsite to do fresh tests on the RAAC panels in the building, which will include drilling into panels to confirm their interior construction and to determine if any further work is required to ensure continuing safety. We expect this procedure could take at least four weeks, and we will look to re-open St David's Hall as soon as possible, dependent on any action which may or may not be required.

We know this will result in inconvenience and disappointment for many people, and we would like to apologise to all our customers. I am grateful for the understanding demonstrated by many of our patrons and promoters that the safety of audiences, staff, artists, volunteers and everyone at the venue is paramount, and that the Council is obliged to act in response to the updated HSE guidance and expert advice.

I would like to pay special tribute to the staff at St David's Hall, who have worked tirelessly to contact promoters and hirers to discuss the potential for rescheduling performances and to review all other options, which have included the relocation of some events, whilst also ensuring all our patrons were promptly informed of the cancellations.

We continue to work to progress the transfer of St David's Hall to Academy Music Group (AMG). Ahead of taking over the operation of the venue, AMG had already undertaken its own inspections and has plans in place to undertake remedial work required in the medium to long term. We will be keeping them apprised of the actions we are taking.

Once again, we apologise to customers of St David's Hall for the late cancellation of shows and want to reassure them that we will be in touch to discuss rescheduling of performances and/or alternatives. I would be grateful if Members could encourage any residents who are affected by any of the cancellations to check the St David's Hall website's 'News' section for any updates.

Christmas in Cardiff 2023

On 16 September 2023, Cardiff launched its 100-day countdown to Christmas. This year will see the return of many seasonal favourites, including Winter Wonderland and the Christmas at Bute Park Light Trail, which will be 50% longer this year. The Cardiff Christmas Market also returns alongside the ever-popular Festive Quarter on Working Street. Further information about this year's festive offering can be found on the Visit Cardiff website at: <https://www.visitcardiff.com/christmas>, where residents and visitors can ensure they stay updated on all the city has to offer by signing up to the mailing list.

Principality Cardiff Half Marathon

I look forward to attending the Principality Cardiff Half Marathon on Sunday 1 October, which is Wales's largest mass participation and charity fundraising event. This year, the Cardiff Half Marathon will also be celebrating its 20th anniversary. The event is now one of Europe's most exciting road races, forming part of the SuperHalves, a global series of the world's most prestigious half marathons, which includes races in Lisbon, Prague, Copenhagen and Valencia. The Principality Cardiff Half Marathon has also been awarded an Elite Label by World Athletics.

As well as making significant economic impact to both the visitor economy and to Wales's international profile, the event also provides a platform to champion health and wellbeing, mental health, equality, diversity and inclusion, women's running, community regeneration, volunteering, charity fundraising, environmental sustainability and the Welsh language and culture. I am sure that Members will wish to join me in wishing the event organiser Run 4 Wales and all those participating an enjoyable and successful event.

Green Flag Awards

In late July 2023, Keep Wales Tidy confirmed that the Council was successful in retaining Green Flag Awards for the 16 parks and green spaces that previously held the status – Bute Park, Cardiff Bay Barrage, Cardiff Bay Wetlands Reserve, Cathays Cemetery, Flat Holm Island, Forest Farm, Grange Gardens, Hailey Park, Heath Park, Hendre Lake, Parc Cefn Onn, Roath Park, Rumney Hill Gardens, Thornhill Cemetery and Cardiff Crematorium, Victoria Park and Waterloo Gardens. Furthermore, the Council was successful in both of its two new Green Flag Awards submissions for Parc Tredelerch in Rumney and Western Cemetery in Ely.

This success would not be possible without the significant contribution made by our network of 'Friends of' groups and volunteers who engender a real sense of ownership, delivering environmental improvements, together with our staff within parks and the bereavement and registration service. This achievement underlines the Council's commitment to providing well-managed parks and green spaces.

In addition to submissions made by the Council that achieved full Green Flag status, 22 Green Flag Community Awards were made across Cardiff and I would like to congratulate all the community groups involved on their achievements. These were awarded to Canolfan Beulah Garden, Chapter Community Garden, Chris McGuigan Memorial Garden, Coed Y Felin, Dusty Forge Garden, Forest Farm Community Allotment, Grow Well Riverside, Howardian Local Nature Reserve, Lansdowne Surgery Garden, Llwynfedw Gardens, Maes y Coed Community Garden, Nant Fawr Community Woodlands, Old St Mellons Community Playing Fields and Park, Pengam Pavilion Allotments, Plasnewydd Community Garden, Railway Garden, Riverside Community Garden, StarGarAllot Community Allotment, St Mellons Community Garden, St Mellons Pantry Garden, St Peters Community Garden and Whitchurch Community Garden.

Parks Investment Schemes

Last month, I was pleased to join local ward members in attending events to celebrate the substantive completion of two park investment schemes at Parc Mackenzie in Cathays and Maltings Park in Splott. The total investment of circa £1.5m has transformed both sites, which will be enjoyed by current and future generations.

Horticultural Trainees

The Council has concluded its recruitment to a new cohort of Horticultural Trainees on four-year schemes. The schemes include a comprehensive programme of practical experience and day release studies, leading to a recognised qualification in amenity horticulture and work experience placements with external partners. The provision of such schemes forms part of the Council's commitment to training and development and ensures the succession of skilled staff required to manage our network of parks and green spaces.

Councillor Jennifer Burke
Cabinet Member for Culture, Parks & Events
21 September 2023