

West End Community Council Minute

7:30pm on the 3rd of March 2020 at 61 Ashfield, 51 Melville Street, EH3 7HL

Present: Dr Gordon M Wyllie (Chair), Ian Robertson (Vice-Chair), David Duncan (Secretary), Alex Milne (Treasurer) Isabel Thom (Planning), Cllr Joanna Mowat, Community Councillors Colin Johnston, Gordon Renton and Martha Baur. By invitation, David Ellis, the CEO of the Ross Development Trust was present to address the Community Council about the Quaich Project and was warmly welcomed.

Discussion

Action

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from or on behalf of Cllr Claire Miller, Cllr Hal Osler and Dr Leonora McAndrew.

2. Minute of meeting held on the 4th of February 2020

The Minute from the last meeting of the Community Council was approved.

3. Presentation about the Quaich Project

Mr Ellis commenced by setting out the Trust's ambition to turn West Princes Street Gardens into "the best public space it can be", in which connection they had started out "by asking the people of Edinburgh what they wanted" in consultation with the Cockburn Association and other stakeholders.

This had revealed a desire for a holistic approach to the WPSG as a whole, with improved but less intrusive facilities in a "greener" environment with fewer "hard" surfaces. Accordingly, the Trust, funded by Norman Springford of Apex Hotels, launched a competition for a design respecting those ambitions and a desire for the space to be "one of the leading examples " of a public garden. With well over a hundred entries, this competition was won by an American company called "wHY", whose design along with seven others had been displayed in the City Arts Centre. The project envisages that the new bandstand area will occupy a similar space to the current bandstand including its hard-standing apron, and that the works will create 20% more green space than exists at present.

In addition to the above aims, a major concern had been to make the garden as self-sustaining as possible, and a recognition that the land itself forms part of the city's Common Good Fund.

During this work, the Trust had restored the Ross Fountain to full constant working order. It was recognised that current wheel-chair access to the garden is inadequate, and it is intended that this be catered for via a new two-tier "Welcome Centre" occupying the substrata of a new extension of the pavement in Princes Street, with minimum impact upon the garden itself except the loss of a rosebed forming part of the embankment.

Mr Ellis went on to say "Almost the entirety of the proposed building will be 'underground' with the only visual impact being the glass front of each tier. This space provides several improvements to the gardens without reducing the garden space available. All the activity that takes place within this space will be contained and therefore almost no impact to the rest of the gardens in terms of noise or disruption.

" Part of the proposal is to remove the hard surface blaes at the western end of the garden and replace it with a surface more appropriate and in keeping with the Gardens. There is still a requirement for an area of hardstanding space in this location but we are aiming to make this a paved and slabbed surface that people can walk across and enjoy as part of their garden experience. This will directly replace the current hard standing area which is a red-clay like material, that is almost always avoided by those using the gardens

gardens.

" This space is often flooded or used by cars to park and makes a mess of people's shoes so visitors will walk around it rather than across it. This is what will be replaced.

" We are also looking to drastically improve the play offering for children. This will be done in a discreet manner utilising nature play material rather than providing multicoloured climbing frames etc. We are aiming to provide resources for young people to enjoy but in keeping with a garden landscape.

" Our proposed changes are easier to see if you are looking at images from our recent consultation on our website."

There is to be a further public consultation in April 2020, and in the meantime the Trust is awaiting a revised business case from the City Council, it being appreciated that considerably more funding will be required beyond the £5m committed by the Trust and the Council, which will involve an element of commercial sponsorship, probably in the form of the naming of features withing the new works.

In response to a number of QUESTIONS, Mr Ellis advised that :-

the current rent of the bandstand for the holding of an event is expensive and prices out community use. Mr Ellis's group have spoken to the highland dancers who use the space on a Monday evening during the summer months and been informed that it can cost up to £2000 (later corrected to £1000) a time which makes using this space almost impossible for small community groups.

the aim of the project is emphatically not to facilitate the holding of larger events; it is focused on allowing use by the community, but still able to facilitate the small number of major events that currently exists.

the actual "footprint" of the proposed new bandstand will be just slightly bigger than the existing one, due to the greenspace "wings" of the performance area

The height of the bandstand is estimated not to exceed 12 metres, which is slightly higher than the current structure in the centre due to the following form of the proposed design

While the construction works will entail the removal of a number of trees, those involved are working hard to minimise any impact on mature specimens, and these mostly lie behind the current edifice or around the blaes area - they will be replaced, and the overall planting will be enhanced.

The naming of features will lie entirely within the purview of the Council.

The next stage of the project will involve approximately 9 months on Planning issues finishing with a decision at Council Committee; if the decision is positive, there would be about another 12 months of detailed design development work and procurement needed before work could start. The work would then be phased to allow small improvements to be made and minimising disruption and impact as much as possible.

No alterations will be made to the steps at either end of the garden, and while maximum public access will be maintained throughout the works, areas of the central area will need to be closed during the construction of the Welcome Centre.

Mr Ellis was thanked for his presentation and the way he had answered the various questions put to him by the members of the Community Council before taking his leave.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising apart from those on the Agenda

5. Police report

No Police were present at the meeting therefore no report was delivered.

6. Public toilet provision at 189 Morrison Street, "The Haymarket"

When the Community Council heard with dismay that the grant of planning permission had failed to stipulate the promised provision of public toilets, reference was made to this being a legal condition of sale, which Cllr Rankin had undertaken to look into. This ought to be enforceable irrespective of any planning permissions. In the absence of any

ought to be enforceable irrespective of any planning permission in the absence of any subsequent update, Cllr Mowat undertook to research the position, and revert.

7. The Quaich Project

Those present felt somewhat reassured that the character of West Princes Street Gardens would not be significantly impaired and might even be improved if the Quaich Project were delivered as described by Mr Ellis. Mrs Thom and Dr Wyllie would be attending a meeting with representatives of the Cockburn Association and the three other community councils on 19 March to further discuss a common approach prior to the matter coming again before the City Council.

(This meeting was cancelled due to concerns anent the virulence of the coronavirus)

8. Summer closure of West Princes Street Gardens

It was noted that the gardens will be closed for a period of time over the summer to facilitate a private commercial event.

9. Commemorative Benches

A report on the destruction of the benches is due soon.

10. Renewal of domain name

Access to the WECC bank account is still pending, once this has been granted to the New Treasurer, the domain name will be renewed.

11. South East Locality

There was no news or developments regarding the South East Locality.

12. Councillor's Report

Cllr Mowat referred to various items of business mostly already touched upon, and Gordon Renton again voiced his concerns regarding the apparent misuse of business parking permits in the local area.

13. Finance and Planning Reports

The Treasurer reported that the balance in the community Councils favour remained unchanged from the last meeting.

Isabel Thom was thanked for her usually detailed planning report. No significant planning application objections were noted.

14. AOCB

There was no other business. Martha Baur noted her absence from the next meeting.

15. Dates of next meetings

7th April, 5th May, 2nd June, 7th July, 4th August, 1st September, 6th October, 3rd November and 1st December

Due to the Coronavirus issue, there will be no meetings in April or June

This was all the business

