

# You can still help to Save the Forest

✖ The Forest is asking its friends and supporters to [object to the proposed alterations](#) to their current premises in Bristo Place. While the self-sufficient arts centre is looking for a new home, the new owners are seeking permission to alter the internal structure of the listed building. The planning application also includes proposals to open a restaurant at the site.

The potential owner, Shafqet Maqbool of the Mosque Kitchen, has applied to change the building into a restaurant and introduce a mezzanine level to increase the building's floor space. The building, formerly the Edinburgh Congressional Church, designed by Scottish architect Sydney Mitchell and built in 1899/1900, is a category-B listed building. The only part of the building where this could happen is on the upper floors of the former church, which contains a Gray and Davison-built pipe organ.

The Forest has successfully raised £25,000 to secure its future since October, which will help fund the move and development of a new location. The organisation is looking for a suitable vacant location to become the Forest's new home, as well as people with the skills and qualifications to evaluate any property. Once a new location is found, the charity will need volunteers to help refurbish and redecorate it. People can also help by joining the Save the Forest campaign team to raise funds and awareness. For those who don't have the time but still want to help the Forest there is the opportunity to make a monthly donation by direct debit from as little as £3 per month.

✖ Ken O'Neill, the Forest's Move Manager, said:-

“We are all disappointed and surprised to learn about these plans. One of our volunteers who is assisting our search for a new location was using the City of Edinburgh’s Public Access for Planning website and came across the application by chance. Of course we are sad to leave Bristo Place after almost eight years, but can understand that Mr Maqbool does not want sitting tenants. However, to find that this much-loved building will change from a vibrant community arts and events space into yet another restaurant in an already competitive market is very disappointing. I would have thought that having just open a new restaurant five minutes walk away, the Mosque Kitchen would not want to flood the market. The area already has many restaurants offering a wide variety of cuisines who are struggling in the current economic climate. This seems almost predatory behaviour more associated with large nationwide chains, buying up properties to eliminate the competition. I am sure, however, that is not Mr Maqbool’s intention.”

“A previous bid to convert the property into ten bedsits and three private flats was withdrawn earlier this year when the developer realised people’s strength of feeling about the plans. I would encourage anybody who cares about Edinburgh’s cultural and architectural heritage to voice their concerns to the Planning Committee and Development Management Sub-Committee and their local councillor. The Forest wishes Mr Maqbool and the Mosque Kitchen all the best with their purchase of 3 Bristo Place. However, we do not want to see this listed historic building transformed into yet another restaurant in an already crowded market. We hope that they reconsider their plans and make better use of the former church.”

People can object to this proposal in several ways:-

- By visiting the [Edinburgh Council Planning Portal website](#) and type in any of the application numbers – 11/01920/FUL, 11/01921/FUL and 11/01922/LBC. You can

then comment on the applications but should include some of the following information:-

- That the conversion of a community space that is accessible to people of lower incomes to a restaurant adversely affects the character and vitality of Edinburgh City Centre. Refer to Edinburgh City Local Plan, p71 (Policy Com 1): "Development involving the loss of valuable local community facilities without replacement will not be allowed, unless appropriate alternative provision is to be made" (p71) and "6.39 Facilities such as local doctor and dental surgeries, local shops, community halls and meeting rooms are necessary to foster community life. Equally, the Council will seek to retain facilities of proven value, if threatened by redevelopment proposals without prospect of replacement."
- That this application is in contradiction to the City's stated aims of creating a diverse city centre, as declared in "Chapter 10 – City Regeneration: Objectives" of the Edinburgh City Local Plan (p135) and again on p136 in Policy Ca 1: "Development in the central area will be permitted which maintains and enhances the character, attractiveness, vitality and accessibility of the city centre and contributes to its role as the regional service centre and Edinburgh's role as a capital city. The requirements in principle will be for: a) comprehensively designed proposals which maximise the potential of the site in accordance with any relevant site development brief and/or other guidance b) a use or a mix of uses appropriate to the location of the site, its accessibility characteristics and the character of the surrounding area."
- Arguments in favour of rejecting the proposed plan based on the status of the building as grade B listed (rejection of the Listed Building Consent): Number 3 Bristo Place is a Category B Listed Building. This means that the exterior and interior of the building are

protected on the recommendation of Historic Scotland.

- Call or visit your local councillor and ask them to reject the applications. You can find your local councillor via the City of Edinburgh Council's website (<http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/councillors/search>).
- Like the [Save the Forest Facebook Page](#) where you can object to the plans