

Design competition launched today for Ross Bandstand replacement



Malcolm Reading Consultants have today launched a competition to find an architectural team who can redesign the space presently occupied by the Ross Bandstand. The new design will include a pavilion to replace it, a visitor centre with café and landscaping to compliment the new buildings.

The building will have to be a year-round replacement for the almost 80 year-old structure which is the centrepiece at Hogmanay, but little used at other times.

Malcolm Reading, Competition Director, said: "This is a site with strategic position, a rich and varied topography, not to mention a 900-year-old Castle on hand. A Pavilion offers designers one of the ultimate creative tests – the potential to create a world-within-a-world.

"The competition will create not only a civic emblem but also a living entity, a much-needed platform at the heart of the city, for national and local events, to re-energise this valued green space."

Full details of how to enter the competition, which will be open until 13 March, can be found on the competition [website](#).

Norman Springford is the main benefactor of the project to replace the Ross Bandstand with a newly designed building. He says that his reason for this is clear:

" I love Edinburgh and I am born and bred here. My whole family is here along with grandchildren. It is nice to try and put something back in.

“We are launching an international design competition today. It is an exciting time for the whole Ross Development Trust to do that.

“Many people have asked what kind of design I would want. The answer is just let’s see what comes out of the process. Let’s establish the principle of it first that we do feel there is a need to replace the existing open air theatre which has been here since 1935. It has had a good innings and it is a good time for a new building to be erected here on site.

“I have pledged £5 million to kick start the whole process. What we are keen to say is a public private corporation. It is for the benefit of the whole city and we hope that the whole city can join us in this.

“The likelihood is that the bulk of the funds will come from philanthropic trusts, businesses or high net worth individuals, but there will be fund-raising opportunities for all.

“I could always go back to the old days and say Val Doonican – he would be a class act! But I have no real preferences as to who performs here. It is for everyone.

“I used to come here for my lunch every day as I worked along the road. I used to look at it and think that it would be nice to renovate it.”

Culture Convener Councillor Richard Lewis said: “We were truly delighted when a couple of years ago Norman Springford approached us determined to do something for the city of Edinburgh.

“His focus was particularly on Princes Street Gardens and he like so many other people had noticed the state of relative disrepair of the bandstand, the fountain and the gardeners cottage. I don’t think there have been anything other than

superficial repairs since it was built in 1935.

“When he came along with a proposal we have worked very closely with him since then to see what the issues were. This is a UNESCO World Heritage site and there are issues relating to that.

“Since then the RDT was set up to raise the appropriate funds. Here we are today announcing the design competition for what will become the Ross Pavilion.

“Our council support at the moment is entirely in kind in officer time and in dealing with legal issues.

“In terms of the capital question it will be funded entirely from philanthropic giving.

“I would love this to become the regular location for the Edinburgh International Jazz and Blues Festival.

“I think it has that wonderful dramatic iconic background which is certainly lots of the big international blues and jazz festivals around the world have. When you think of Montreal and Lausanne on Lake Geneva and the splendid backdrops they have.

“It is particularly a festival which is in dire need of a home for the past few years and has had a peripatetic existence. That would be wonderful.

In addition it has to also serve the functions of the bigger events at Hogmanay that we have at the moment. For example last New Year we had Paolo Nutini and then there is the SCO who perform at the fireworks.

But also in addition to that I would really like to think that this new space which will be so much more accommodating than the present one would open up the sorts of acts that we haven't yet considered. We would also be able to use it for more community events so that for example people and

performing groups from my own ward in the south of the city could come here to perform.

“It would be really exciting if we could tick all those boxes.”

Asked about whether the audience space will be in any way enclosed the councillor was non-committal but said: “We have to see what architectural designs come up. The brief is fairly broad and rightly so as it gives us more options. But of course we are not in California here and the architects will have to bear that in mind!”



David Ellis, Project Director for the Ross Development Trust, said: “Today we are launching the international design competition.

“We are looking across the world to find the best architectural teams to put in a brand new venue with incredible architectural design and offer something that Edinburgh people will be proud of, but also something we can use on a daily basis.

“We have this incredible area in the centre of the city but it is a redundant space. We can’t use it for anything much right now.

“It is a very important site as the centre of the UNESCO World Heritage site, and it is a garden as well. We will have to be careful with it. It will take up the same space but we have left it quite open to the architectural team to put their spin on it, and to decide how they will interpret it. We expect a huge number of entries.

“The competition launches today and we will then go through the first stage over around 12 weeks. From those entries we will pick five or six entries for the shortlist which will be

considered by the jury.

“We hope to appoint an architect at the end of July beginning of August.”

When the competition has been run it is hoped that subject to all planning permissions the work could be started by next year. The project will include improvements to the Ross Fountain to ensure that this is returned to full working order, refurbishment of the three rain shelters near the Floral Clock and replacement of the access roadway across the railway to King’s Stables Road.

Mr Springford who was originally an accountant, founded the Apex Hotel group with several of its eight hotels in the capital, stepped down as Chair of the group in 2014 in favour of his son Ian. The original Apex was in the Grassmarket formed from an old Heriot-Watt University building. Although accountants might look to the bottom line more than the quality of service, this was not Springford’s own ethos, preferring to offer good service in the family owned chain. He won the Lifetime Achievement Award from Hospitality Industry Trust (HIT) in 2012.