

# Edinburgh councillor blogs – Cllr Alex Staniforth on St Margaret's House

The sale of St Margaret's House at Meadowbank means that it now faces demolition or redevelopment.

Green councillor Alex Staniforth argues that the threat facing Edinburgh Palette which has its home there, highlights a wider opportunity for provision of space for creative and other enterprises in Edinburgh.

✘ “St Margaret's House on London Road has hit the headlines this week, with news that the current owners have agreed a deal with Drum Property Group to sell the building for redevelopment.

“Since it was vacated by the Scottish Government a decade ago, the transformation of St. Margaret's House, an ugly and empty building, into a centre for the arts and a base for a disability charity is one of Edinburgh's great success stories. There are numerous artworks of every style that would never have existed, never been created, were it not for the facilities there – provided thanks to the great efforts of The Edinburgh Palette.

“Many of the occupiers recognise that it was only ever a temporary solution to provision for the arts. It was not built to house a theatre, galleries, studios and a disability charity – those ventures did their best to fit in a place that was not built with their needs in mind. As an actor who has both performed and rehearsed at St Margaret's House I can see that what wonders have been done with the space that is there so I fully understand immediate worries about what happens next and I will do what I can to make any transition as smooth as possible.

“But, seeing what can be achieved with a space which is a long way short of ideal, also makes me wonder what even greater

things would be possible if spaces were designed with communities like that at St Margaret's House in mind.

"If Edinburgh is willing to follow Edinburgh Palette's lead and acknowledge there is a desperate need for what St. Margaret's House currently provides, then there is a real opportunity to give all those exciting activities their own dedicated space. A site (or sites) could be identified where all these projects can reach their full potential in an environment designed for them and one which will not have the threat of development constantly hanging over their heads as it has been in St. Margaret's House.

"Where should that be? As local councillor I think it should remain on London Road – we now have proof such activities can thrive there and the location has provided a great boost to the local economy which would go unnoticed if moved to the city centre.

"So if new owners Drum Property Group genuinely want to invest in a development which stands out from the crowd they could do so much worse than building on, literally, the buzz that Edinburgh Palette has created and offering a home – a real home – to an improved arts and charity venue that the city can be sure to enjoy not just for the next seven years but for the next seventy and beyond.



***Cllr Alex Staniforth is Green culture spokesperson and councillor for Craigentiny-Duddingston***