

Council to discuss the Ross Bandstand today

At today's Culture Committee they will discuss what is happening in Princes Street Gardens, and what might happen if and when the planned redevelopment of the Ross Bandstand goes ahead.



Fundraising has been paused pending further work by a variety of council departments into how the agreement with the charity behind the proposal, the Ross Development Trust (RDT), will play out after the funds have been raised and building is complete.

Although there was a competition to find a design, there has been no movement on the project until some creases in the future governance of the buildings are ironed out. The whole project began when local businessman Norman Springford promised £5 million to the project which then proposed to raise the rest from other individuals and businesses.

One of the problems discussed at the last committee meeting was whether the council can afford to maintain the structure

when it is built.

At that meeting Green Group Councillor Claire Miller mentioned that the philanthropy behind this project is very welcome, but asked whether the trustees had included anything in the competition to ensure it will be sustainable in the future.

Andy Neal, one of the RDT trustees, admitted there was nothing in the winning design which would require any greater level of maintenance, but it needs to be addressed ahead of building in case the council's priorities are diverted and it falls into disrepair in the future.

Mr Ellis who directs the Ross Development Trust said : "Where we are now is that we have a winning design, we have a partner and when we announced that winner we started fundraising. Those early conversations with donors led to a few questions that we now need to answer."



DECISION ON GOVERNANCE

At today's meeting (20 March 2018) the recommendations on the table include forming an arms length company. The councillors will hear that the gardener's cottage has now been refurbished, the work on the fountain is progressing and will be completed this summer. The fountain is being funded by Edinburgh World Heritage, a private benefactor and the Ross

Development Trust. But RDT require clarity on the governance and operation of the new pavilion and garden reception building.

Following a workshop earlier this year, council officers recommend setting up an Arms Length External Organisation (ALEO) If this recommendation is approved then the full council would be asked to rubber-stamp the arrangement. Any such body would have council representatives on its board and would run as a charitable type of organisation with its own constitution.

The gardens will remain in the ownership of the council but there will also have to be a lease arrangement, and a private bill might also have to be passed by the Scottish Government to allow the garden reception building to be constructed on common good land. This legal process could take up to two years, so it is likely to be about three years before any new management team is required to look after the new buildings.

POLITICS

At today's Culture Committee meeting the Green Group has lodged an amendment demanding that West Princes Street Gardens remain accessible to the public in perpetuity. They also ask that further work is carried out on the plans and proposals for governance, and that the matter is deferred to 3 May 2018 to allow for that.

COSTS

Andy Neal reminded councillors in January that the whole project will cost £25 million. The response to the project was positive, but then something came up which he admitted they should have thought about before. He explained that the development agreement between the Ross Development Trust and the council extends to the fundraising and building stages, but nothing beyond that.

Mr Neal said : “The question being asked by prospective donors was that if we build something how can we be sure that it does not gradually through under investment fall into disrepair. The bandstand is a current testament to what can happen if you don’t have the funds to properly maintain something.”

He explained that there has been a lull in proceedings and that is why the trustees came back to the council and suspended fundraising until they had answers. They have not had any further discussions with architects as this would involve committing hundreds of thousands of pounds which they do not yet have.

He concluded : “The trustees need to know that they can give donors reassurance while maintaining all of the public access and benefits that the park currently offers.”

Director of Place Paul Lawrence pointed out that the project cuts across many areas of the council, including finance and planning. He explained that the idea after the January meeting was to formulate a proposal to submit to the Finance Committee setting out how to address future maintenance and sustainability, as well as programming.

Mr Lawrence said : “The planning application and the fundraising will take some time. We are just at the beginning of the process and want to move to the next stage to make it happen.”

Councillor Miller suggested that the proposal to come back to the Culture Committee first before it goes to the Finance Committee, and this is the reason for the discussions today. The Finance Committee meets next week.

ROSS DEVELOPMENT TRUST

The Ross Development Trust became a registered charity in September 2016 to improve the offering in West Princes Street Gardens and the Ross Theatre. In June 2016 a development

agreement was put in place to allow the charity to put these improvements in place.



The most notable work that has been done to date and that you may have seen in the gardens is to restore the Ross Fountain.

Mr Ellis told councillors : “This is a fantastic part of the city and has been in place for the last 145 years. Our work has involved dismantling the fountain, all 122 pieces of it, taking it to our workshop in Wigan and repairing, cleaning and repainting the individual pieces.

“An enormous amount of work has been done on the foundations and to install a 21st century pumping system and to make sure that when it does come back it will be fully operational for the next century.

“At the end of February we are going to start putting it back in place and it should be operational by mid June.”



The concept drawing for the winning design. wHY (USA) is an international consortium made up of GRAS, Groves-Raines Architects, Arup, 0 Street, Creative Concern, Noel Kingsbury, Yann

Kersalé Studio, Lawrence Barth, Stuco, Alan Cumming, Aaron Hicklin, Alison Watson, Peter Ross, Adrian Turpin and Beatrice Colin.

Mr Ellis also explained the process by which the charity ran an international design competition to find a replacement design for the Ross Theatre. He said : “The response was an overwhelming 125 submissions from architects all over the world. This was whittled down to seven entries and these were displayed at the City Art Centre where members of the public came to have a look.”

Finally the competition winner [was announced last year](#). The winning design was the US architectural firm **why** in collaboration with Leith based architects **GRAS.**”

He continued that this resulted in the kind of partnership which married international expertise with local knowledge which he believes is key to such an important site in the city. Mr Ellis explained that on the day the competition was announced the news had a reach of around 96 million people with the ability to see it.

GREAT GIFT

The fountain was gifted to the city by Mr Daniel Ross, a local gunmaker, 'with inclinations to art and natural science'. He bought it at the Great Exhibition of 1862 in London where it was described as 'obtaining universal admiration'. It was dismantled into its 122 constituent pieces and shipped to Leith in September 1869.

There was considerable debate about where to site the fountain until its present location was eventually agreed upon. At the time, West Princes Street Gardens were private subscription gardens and the water only operated 'on Sundays and when the band plays'.