

New buildings at the Botanics to be approved

Proposals to overhaul the Royal Botanic Gardens are set to be given the green light – despite concerns that 48 trees will be chopped down to make way.

The city council's development management sub-committee will consider £70m plans for a new greenhouse and education centre as part of the revamp of the north east corner of the Inverleith green space.

A new curved glasshouse, 20m in height, will be built with a multi-level walkway to house a "wider range of plant specimens" as well as a new visitor attraction. The current education building will be replaced with a new structure while a new research glasshouse will replace the existing range of interconnecting research glasshouses. Existing greenhouses are set to be upgraded to double-glazing.

But Stockbridge and Inverleith Community Council has formally objected to the plans, claiming the size of the new glasshouse is "unsuitable", and that a proposed new entrance will lead to a "loss of amenity to neighbours". The group has also pointed to the removal of dozens of trees as part of the plans. Planning documents claim the trees being removed do not "contribute to the character of the area" and the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh (RBGE) confirmed that once construction work is completed, more trees will be planted than are chopped down.

Community council planning officer, Pam Barnes, said: "48 mature trees are to be removed. Some of them seem neither to

be in the way of the new buildings nor in the way of the temporary route for site traffic.

“There appears to be no necessity to remove such a large number of trees for the development and the general public might be shocked by the result as they were recently in East Princes St Gardens when 50 mature trees were removed.”

The proposals have won praise from planning officers, who pointed out a “minimal” loss of green space.

In a report to councillors, officers said: “The proposals for the replacement of trees to be removed, as a result of the proposed works, will ensure that these important elements of the area’s character are retained.

“The alterations that are part of this refurbishment will allow the RBGE to maintain the high standard of the collection in buildings that are fit for purpose. The alterations are sensitive to the listed buildings and will preserve their special character.”

A RBGE spokesperson said “Approximately 1,907 of the 3,268 trees are of known wild origin and the collection is being constantly added to with new plantings. The trees reflect the history of RBGE and the future interests of the organisation – they make-up a research collection, an educational resource and a valuable high-quality urban green space.

“As such, considerable time and care has been taken in making informed decisions concerning which trees should be removed, moved and retained from both the main garden and the nearby nursery in the event of receiving planning permission for our Edinburgh Biomes project. This project is a necessity to avoid the catastrophic loss of up to four thousand species in our collection.”

She added: “The removal of these trees within the living collection will be mitigated through the representation of the species by other accessions currently within our living collection and future replanting.

“On completion of the building works, more trees will be

replanted than will have been removed. The new trees we plant will have significantly greater conservation status.”



The existing glasshouse at the Botanics