

Planning committee approves Botanics expansion

Proposals to overhaul the city's Royal Botanic Gardens have been given the green light despite fears over a new access point.

The £70m plans by the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh (RBGE) were approved by the city council's development management sub-committee and have been labelled "the most significant project in the gardens' history".

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.

A separate application to build a new sustainable energy centre and 'plant health suite' at the gardens' nursery site, north of the public area, was also approved by councillors. The technology, only matched in the UK by Kew Gardens, will use a combination of ground-source heat pumps, combined heat and power engines and gas boilers to produce both heat and electricity to the main gardens attraction and greenhouses.

Planning convener, Cllr Neil Gardiner, said: "I welcome this exciting new addition to Edinburgh's botanic gardens which is a national asset.

"It's another brilliant bit of Edinburgh and I think this is a really good scheme."

But Cllr Hal Osler, called for the plans to be turned down due to an amended access to the gardens, saying it "isn't absolutely crucial to the development".

She added: "I really do feel there's no necessity for the access. I have no issue with any other parts of this – it is a very good application.

"I do not see the necessity to move that access for the convenience of the Botanic because of their new design, which does negatively impact on the existing residents."

But councillors put the concern aside and approved the proposals.

RBGE regius keeper, Simon Milne, said: "As a world-leading botanic garden responding to the climate emergency and the associated alarming loss of biodiversity, we recognise this is an essential, urgent and exciting project of national and international significance, bringing great benefits to society. It is a necessity to avoid the catastrophic loss of up to four thousand species in our collection.

"The planning decision enables us to move forward with what is the most significant project in the gardens' history. The need for our pioneering work has never been greater, be it through cutting-edge science, impactful education or inspiring people with the beauty and value of natural capital. Edinburgh Biomes is crucial to achieve this and the project needs the widest possible support if we are to secure our place as a leader in plant science and education, horticulture and ensure the astonishing living collection thrives for future generations.

"Edinburgh Biomes will engage people of all backgrounds and nationalities, inspiring them to be part of the protection of plant life that sustains and delights us."

