

Doubt cast over the future of The Dunard Centre

A flagship £45m concert hall set to be built in the heart of the New Town may have been thrown into doubt as developers explore alternative sites and have put the project on pause.

Impact Scotland secured planning permission for the Dunard Centre, to be built behind the RBS building at St Andrew Square in April.

But the 1,000-capacity concert hall, earmarked to become the new home of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, is subject to a judicial review being brought by the developers of the next-door Edinburgh St James against Edinburgh City Council.

With the legal hold ups, which could take years, Impact Scotland is now believed to be seeking out where else the concert hall could be built – as the project, initially due to open in 2023, could be held up in the courts for years.

The news comes as the council, which is being taken to court for approving planning permission, has asked for mediation in an effort to settle the legal challenge. The authority said it cannot comment on ongoing legal proceedings.

A spokeswoman from Impact Scotland, said: “We very much hope that a way forward can be reached to allow us to start construction of the Dunard Centre.

“We are facing a difficult, indeterminate delay to the project following the neighbouring St James’ shopping and hotel centre developers petitioning the courts for a judicial review of the

council's planning processes – this has led us to temporarily pause work on the project.

“It makes sense during this period that we consider all options available to us as our overriding goal is to find a way forward to begin construction of the Dunard Centre and create Edinburgh's first purpose-built performance venue in over 100 years.”

The Edinburgh St James bosses lodged the judicial review bid in the summer, believing the city council has breached rules to protect the World Heritage Site and a strict skyline policy for the city centre in approving the project.

Conservative group economy spokesperson, Cllr John McLellan said: “The obvious difficulties with this site were brushed under the carpet for reasons the council has yet to answer and the chickens are well and truly coming home to roost.

“There should be serious questions asked about. In this case, and we are seeing it with the Christmas market in Princes Street Gardens, the council is making all kinds of exceptions for all things it wanted and other developers must be wondering what the hell is going on.”



The move is a major blow for the various backers of the concert hall project who spent around 20 years trying to identify a suitable site before the land behind The Royal Bank of Scotland was presented to them. Keen for the venue to be in the city centre, among the options they looked at and abandoned were the Teviot site of the Edinburgh University Students Association and a proposal to extend the Queens Hall.

One business source said: "This is no surprise. In their eagerness to support the project, the team and many supporters looked the other way on all the key planning issues.

"The bar was set ultra low because it was not seen as a 'commercial' project. Hopefully lessons have been learned, the concert hall is certainly much needed."

David Bol is the Local Democracy Reporter covering Edinburgh. The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a public service news agency : funded by the BBC, provided by the local news sector, and used by qualifying partners. Local Democracy Reporters cover top-tier local authorities and other public

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