

Ten questions for David Ellis of The Quaich Project

What's happening with The Quaich Project in West Princes Street Gardens?

This is the project begun five years ago with a £5 million pledge by businessman Norman Springford, and which will perhaps culminate in a £25 million building in Princes Street Gardens to replace the outdated Ross Bandstand.

We asked David Ellis of charity, The Ross Development Trust to sit down with us on a wet and windy Princes Street to answer some questions about the project that he is in charge of.



David Ellis PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter

What is the Quaich Project?

David Ellis explained : “The Quaich Project is a partnership between ourselves at The Ross Development Trust and The City of Edinburgh Council to effectively take Princes Street Gardens – which is one of the most loved public green spaces in Edinburgh – and really make it the best space that could possibly be, to the benefit of everyone that lives in the city.

“I think it’s been clear that over the last few generations, there’s not been enough money available to help maintain it and continually improve it. It’s looking a little bit tired, and the infrastructure, a lot of it’s desperately needing improved and that’s what we’re here to do.”

We sat down on a wet and windy Princes Street with David

Ellis of [@QuaichProject](#) and fired some questions at him. 1
What is The Quaich Project pic.twitter.com/IFix6JBSMk

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [February 17, 2020](#)

How are you funding The Quaich Project?

“The Ross Development Trust, which at the moment is paying for all the work, is a charity that’s been set up with the intention of raising funding from various sources, whether that be individuals, corporates, trust funding, public sources, public bodies. We’ve been relying on donations to keep us going for the last five years. And we’ve been very clear from day one that this is about us acting as a vehicle to try and go out and find that support and the funding and help deliver all the improvements that we’re looking to make within the gardens.”



2 How are you funding The Quaich Project?
pic.twitter.com/8Yus0d3dQH

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [February 17, 2020](#)

Will Princes Street Gardens become a private asset?

“This land will always remain common good land. That’s one of the things that we’ve been very clear with the council about. There’s never even been a discussion about that changing. The work that we’re trying to do here is about trying to improve that land for the benefit of everyone that lives in Edinburgh.”

Will Princes Street become a private asset?

pic.twitter.com/uPH379n5Ck

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [February 17, 2020](#)

Is the fundraising in any way secret?

Absolutely not. I think we we launched our public fundraising campaign in spring of last year. We've held events in Los Angeles and New York and London in Edinburgh There is a recognition that the council don't have the money to be able to make these improvements and we're working with them to try and help in partnership deliver these improvements to the benefit of the city. And we're looking for support for people not just in Edinburgh but all around the world that have an affinity to the city.

What benefits and perks are you offering to funders?

pic.twitter.com/FjcSzjULYk

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [February 17, 2020](#)

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"We're looking at obviously a number of different types of sponsorship, the majority of it will be philanthropic giving, in which people or individuals or businesses will just effectively give us money in correlation with what our intentions of the charity are, which are to make the gardens the best space they can possibly be They can't make demands for how that money is used, or they can't seek financial return based on that philanthropic giving. Effectively we've been running on philanthropic giving, for the last five years, we've taken over 6 million pounds worth of that and there's

been nothing in the gardens to effectively let anyone know that that's been the case.

"We are looking at opportunities for corporate sponsorship where there are small returns for giving gifts We're trying to offer opportunities or small things that don't affect the gardens in any way. They won't make any difference to those people that want to come and visit them. We are exploring options for naming rights. But that's something that's been – there's a history of in the gardens. If you look at the Ross bandstand itself, just now that's one naming right You look at the Ross Fountain, another one, there's benches in there over 150 of them all with people's names on them. It's something that's common in the city. There's buildings all over Edinburgh that have got people's names on them. And if we can look to somebody that's prepared to give a substantial gift to the city, in return for their name being on the building, I think that's a win win for everyone involved."

These benefits are contained in the corporate brochures which the Quaich Project has published in collaboration with the council. A council spokesman told The Edinburgh Reporter : "The Ross Development Trust shared with the council all sponsorship documentation before it was produced."

This is one example :



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How do we know the funding is transparent?

“Well, I feel like from our point of view, we’ve been transparent with everything we’ve done to date. We’ve got a good relationship with the council. We’ve been working with them on what we can offer people in return. Certainly we will be doing our own due diligence as a charity to look at potential sponsorship or donor opportunities. Once we have something of a substantial gift, we will have to be taking that to our council officers team who will then potentially go to Council Committee depending on the size of the donation. But yes we won’t making any decisions on our own. We will be looking for the opportunities, trying to get people excited about the project that are prepared to provide a significant donation, and then we’ll be working with the council to make sure that they’re happy with that, that whoever that’s coming from.”

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– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [February 17, 2020](#)

Who will manage the gardens after the new building is in place?

Management or the ownership of the gardens has been talked about a lot in the last few years. And we recently went to the Culture and Communities committee in January, with a business case – the council business case – of how the space was going to operate. I just want to be clear that it will be the council who do that and continue to do it. They’re working on a sort of management plan at the moment. And numbers around

how that space will work because people want answers with regards to how many events there's going to be, etc, etc. And to touch on that to be clear the Council have come out and said publicly that they're not going to increase the number of days the gardens are used for major events, than what's there just now, but you'll have the benefit of all the small community performances that this new facility will be able to hold.

Who will manage the gardens after the building is in place?
pic.twitter.com/0uno5btncJ

– *Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter)* [February 17, 2020](#)



Can you put a specific number on the major events which will be held in the gardens?

Not on the number of major events, but I can put a number on the number of days that will be used and that's 15. The council had previously been talking about five major events but there was then confusion there because some events were more than one event. To be more transparent the Council have started talking about the number of days the gardens will be used.

When do you next go back to the council with a report?

From a design point of view, we're working through our planning application. We're hoping to submit that towards the beginning of the summer. But in terms of the business case, that'll be the next thing that goes back to Council. At the committee meeting in January, the councillors were looking for more information and more detail behind those figures. And the council officers have committed to having a report ready or an

updated business model by the next meeting, which will be at the end of March. So there should be something going to the Culture and Communities committee in March.

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pic.twitter.com/jbNykMQ7UF

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Do you think people in Edinburgh want a new Ross bandstand?

Absolutely.

How do you know that?

“We’ve been speaking to people to stakeholders for five years. We’ve held numerous consultations, events. I’ve spoken to thousands of people about this project since I started and the support has been, I wouldn’t say unanimous, but it’s been very, very close to that. I mean, I can count the number of negative conversations I’ve had with people on one hand, and most of the negativity is based on misconceptions. Given other things that are happening in the city and in the world of social media, it’s easy for those misconceptions to be had.

“It’s our job to try and put the correct messages out there to reassure people this is a project set up by people that love the city with a charitable intent to try and make this garden the best space it can possibly be. And ultimately, that’s going to be for the benefit of residents.”

Do you think people living in Edinburgh want a new Ross Bandstand? pic.twitter.com/JB0UjZbDnt

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [February 17, 2020](#)

Supporters

Edinburgh World Heritage said last year when writing about the Waverley Valley : “It is essential that any intervention within the valley – for example plans for Waverley Railway Station, or the Quaich redevelopment of the Ross Bandstand, all respect the integrity of the valley and preserve its role as what Scott called the ‘great arena’ between the Old and New Towns.”

At the council’s [Culture and Communities committee meeting](#) in January the Cultural Venues manager clarified that the Welcome Centre, the building or pavilion which is part of the Quaich Project would help to make the gardens more accessible.

At the same meeting the council officer said they preferred to refer to ‘event days’ in future than the number of events themselves. There will actually be more events held there, but these will be regular small community events within the pavilion itself rather than big commercial concerts in the gardens.

David Ellis said to the meeting that they set up the stakeholder group about a year ago and commented that it was heartening to hear that those taking part considered it

worthwhile. The stakeholders include local community councils, Edinburgh World Heritage and the Cockburn Association. He also said to the meeting that this is the best green space in any city centre and if the Ross Development Trust or The Quaich Project don't raise the money then it simply will not happen. But he also stated that it is his hope that the space will work in harmony in future as both a garden and an event space.

Conservative councillor Phil Daggart commented that his political group did support the project but questioned whether the outline business case 'muddied the waters'. He said : "The real issue is not with the Quaich Project. I think people have an issue with the council and the responsibility of the council of managing the space after the Quaich has moved away."

Cllr Daggart also queried the value of the graphs contained in the business case, and following his amendment which was accepted by the committee, the report will come back to the Culture and Communities Committee with more information on 24 March 2020. The papers for that meeting will be published [here](#) anytime after 17 March 2020.