

Grand Theft Auto designer nicks in to snap up former Edinburgh hotel

An entrepreneur who made his fortune in the gaming industry is the new owner of the Dalriada Hotel on Portobello Promenade.

Leslie Benzies is the creative genius who developed the Grand Theft Auto series into one of the world's biggest selling and most successful video game franchises.

The popular hotel and bar had been marketed by Rettie & Co for sale at offers of over £950,000 and missives were concluded in September. Property industry experts estimate it will take at least an additional £500,000 to upgrade the B-listed building in to a luxury family home.

The Dalriada was purchased from hoteliers Terry and Alison Magill on 16 September by Mariah Venture Limited, a recently formed private company of which Mr Benzies is the sole shareholder.

Philip Johnston, a spokesman for Mr Benzies, confirmed to the Edinburgh Reporter that contrary to earlier speculation the building would not be converted into individual flats but would be developed as a single family home.

Mr Johnston said: "I can confirm 77 Promenade will not continue as a licensed premises and that plans will be submitted in due course to convert the property back into private use. Other than that, Mr Benzies regards this

transaction as a private matter.”



Work has started on the Dalriada Hotel, purchased by Grand Theft Auto designer Leslie Benzies

Leslie Benzies, 49, made his reputation as the lead developer of the global gaming success story Grand Theft Auto series and later was appointed president of Rockstar North, a subsidiary of games company Rockstar Games. The Grand Theft Auto series is estimated to have sold one quarter of a billion copies and grossed more than \$6 billion – exceeding the most successful film franchises.

In September, The Telegraph reported that Mr Benzies had raised £32 million from investors to develop his new science fiction game Everywhere, which is being created by his company Build a Rocket Boy which has studios in Leith, Budapest and Los Angeles.

Born in Aberdeen, he first took an interest in computer games aged just 11 when his father bought him a Dragon 32 computer and he taught himself how to programme and he wrote his first game.

In 2005 he and Rockstar Games president Sam Houser, were awarded a BAFTA Special Award, followed in 2015 by a BAFTA Fellowship, which celebrates outstanding artistic achievements in movies, television and video games.

Mr Benzies departed Rockstar in 2016 and launched a legal case in which he claimed he was due \$150 million in unpaid royalties. The dispute was settled last year but the terms have never been made public.



Dalriada Hotel has called last orders after it was sold to video games tycoon Leslie Benzies

In June 2014 he purchased St Stephen's Church in Stockbridge, with plans to preserve the building and create a community trust to manage it. In 2017 he offloaded the listed church when it was acquired by former director of English National Ballet, Peter Schauffus.

The Dalriada attracted strong interest from established hospitality sector operators when it went on the market but the hotel has now called last orders for the final time.