

Calders community asset transfer moving forward

The Calders Residents Association (CRA) have plans for a community asset transfer of the former janitor's house in the grounds of Sighthill Primary School.

Although there had been a little delay in getting there, the group met with City of Edinburgh Council officers at the end of last week to discuss the next stage. And the response from the council was a favourable one. The proposal to take over the former janitor's house will now move onto Phase Two.

The residents applied for feasibility funding to the Scottish Land Fund at the end of 2020 and obtained around £12,000 to prepare a business plan. They appointed Lee Boyd Architects to draft up plans for a new community hub. The plans show how the residents would reuse the building for local organisations to use for all sorts of reasons from meetings to educational classes. There would be a café for training as well as catering, and the grounds outside would become a community garden.



The CRA's five year business plan shows both opportunities for the building and the people living in the area, in the form of both the new centre and new jobs.

The group has worked for some time in a small flat in the Calders, as the community centre was demolished in 2014 and during the pandemic Gate 55 became a Covid testing centre.

Caroline Bruce, Secretary of CRA, said: "From Monday to Friday during the pandemic volunteers distributed food parcels and meals to local people. We got 150 packed lunches each day from Social Bite and Cyrenians some of which were delivered to the people living in sheltered housing. We ensured they always had a meal. Before Covid we had made a start on this project and kept it going during lockdown. Our community centre at the back of the Calders shops was taken away about eight years ago. It was well laid out and had everything we needed and we have had nothing since. We really need something in the community, and have made do with the community flat which you can't do much with. CRA Chair Michelle Robson and I have spoken about this for a few years now.

"Youth agencies in the area and other different groups all

need a bigger space to work in. We got through Phase 1 of the process and got £12,000 of funding from Scottish Land Fund to make progress.

“Now with a meeting planned we can move to the next stage and find out what the council want to do with the building. We heard before they planned to turn it into a car park.”



A community asset transfer is the process which allows local groups to take over publicly owned buildings as long as they can prove there will be a real benefit to the community. There are many examples of the process being used to advantage all over the city, such as Bruntsfield St Oswalds church where the group which has taken it over hopes to open the building to the public in 2022. Similar projects in Colinton and Juniper Green have also progressed quite quickly.

The new owner can either have the legal title transferred to it or take a long lease of the building meaning that it stays in the ownership of the council or other public body.

The CRA realise that they may have to constitute a charitable body of some kind to progress further but they are looking forward to working with the council on the next stage. If a

community asset transfer proves impossible for any reason then an alternative will have to be found. CRA are adamant that people living in the Calderes require a community-based focus, and that means first of all securing an appropriate building.

Cllr Neil Gardiner is supportive of the plan. He said: "This is an interesting initiative from the local community in the Calderes, using SNP government legislation to support community empowerment. As local councillor I am meeting the Calderes Residents Association to hear more about how their ambitions and plans for this building have progressed. Also having made enquiries on behalf of the residents, a stage 1 community asset transfer meeting has been organised by the council for 29th November. I will be present at this meeting."

Cllr Ricky Henderson said: "I am aware that the community in the Calderes and Wester Hailes are pursuing a community asset transfer for the former Janitors house and I am very supportive in principle of this taking place."

South West Edible Estates have also supported the plans with administrative support.

In the south west of Edinburgh the Wester Hailes Community Trust has just appointed Urban Pioneers to create the Local Place Plan which will wrap around the work which the council and their design teams are carrying out in the area. The kind of development which CRA propose for the Calderes would fall squarely within the ideals of a Local Place Plan.



