

# Plans for Custom House in Leith are a surprise and “disappointing” to local councillor

The council’s Culture and Communities meeting on Tuesday will discuss the future of Custom House in Leith, acquired from Scottish Historic Buildings Trust (SHBT) for the city in a £650,000 deal.

This will be one of the last meetings of this council administration and according to local councillor, Gordon Munro, the appearance of a last minute report on the future of such an important building is “disappointing”.

He told The Edinburgh Reporter: “This report is disappointing. As a ward councillor I had no idea this was coming. As the councillor who recommended that we use the Common Good Fund to purchase this building it is doubly disappointing to see the reason it was bought to secure it as a Museum for Leith given a token space.

“There needs to be a wider discussion on this Common Good asset and a real need for a body or a board that holds to account how the building is managed.

“Rather than agree the recommendations there needs to be time for the community as a whole to have a discussion about the way forward. I hope the committee agrees with this simple

request.”

The report states: “During development of the study it became clear that the level of external funding for a capital project for a single use community option, such as a Museum project, would be extremely challenging to achieve and that the revenue costs associated with such a venture, likely requiring significant third-party subsidy, would make this particular option unsustainable. The Council has confirmed it is not in a position to develop or operate another single use museum of a scale of the entire Custom House building. To date no other third party, with a proven track record of delivering and operating a venue of the scale of Custom House has been identified.

“The feasibility study therefore investigated a “hybrid” building use. It is however central to the Custom House development to incorporate some form of heritage display provision which would allow significant access for the community and visitors in the proposals.”

Following the completion of a new collections facility in Granton, the National Museum of Scotland planned to sell off the building for redevelopment in 2015. But SHBT stepped in. The City of Edinburgh Council purchased the building and then leased it to SHBT who have a record of dealing with historic buildings such as the Riddle’s Court building on the Royal Mile which was a £6.2 million renovation project.



Custom House in 2016 when it was bought for the city. Culture Convener Richard Lewis with Lord Provost Donald Wilson and John Campbell QC Chair of SHBT Other photos below show local councillors Chas Booth and Gordon Munro along with Adam McVey as well as Cllr Lesley Hinds and local MP Deidre Brock.









Initial repairs, funded by the council, have enabled the building to be opened up to the public and used for a variety of meanwhile purposes whilst SHBT develops plans for its long-term future.

It has become a local arts hub, with artists' and designers' studios, an art school, and a gallery used for exhibitions and events. The adjacent car park, leased by SHBT from Forth Ports, has also become a community centre as the venue for the weekly Leith Market.



Augourmand Bread at Leith Market. Photo: Martin P. McAdam  
www.martinmcadam.com

Following an initial round of public consultation, SHBT have appointed [Richard Murphy Architects](#) to produce a feasibility study for the Custom House.

Chas Booth Green councillor for Leith said on his own Facebook page: “The report on the future of Custom House, Leith, has been published, and is due to be considered by the council’s Culture and Communities Committee on Tuesday 26 April. The recommendation is to, “Agree the preferred option – Option 4 – Mixed-use community and creative hub – be progressed over the next three years as detailed in the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust (SHBT) Feasibility Study.

“This recommendation would, “allow the accessible display of heritage artefacts relating to the history of Leith”.

“I know some people will be disappointed the recommendation is not for a full-blown Museum of Leith, so I’m keen to hear the views of constituents about this. I am also keen to work on a

cross-party basis to find a way forward in the best interests of Leith, and I have already spoken to my two ward colleagues about this.”