

Council applying for millions from the UK Government Levelling Up Funding programme

The City of Edinburgh Council is applying for a share of the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund for projects in Edinburgh and, if needed, will call an emergency committee meeting to approve the submission before the deadline of 1 August.

The council discussed the application at [a June committee meeting](#) when councillors were asked to approve applications of a total of £42 million for cultural venues in the city and for the regeneration of Inch Park where the council has its plant nursery.

The details of all the projects currently being considered are

contained in a document at the foot of this article.

Director of Place, Paul Lawrence, explained the background of the applications to the two funds – one of which is competitive and one not – to councillors on the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee on 23 June.

Mr Lawrence said: “The Levelling Up Fund is a competitive process for local authorities to put forward the projects which they think will achieve the objectives set out in the Levelling Up Bill. Officers brought forward a pipeline of bids for Round One. These are partly related to UK Parliamentary constituencies and that is the geography on which bids are based.

“Slightly to our surprise, but we were delighted in the first round of the Levelling Up bids to be successful in achieving £16 million for the Granton Gasholder which is one of the council’s foremost regeneration sites. This is a major capital project which would not have been funded by private development. My colleagues in the Granton team are taking forward expenditure of that money here and now. With the funding come deadlines and we have to get it spent by certain dates.

“In the Levelling Up fund there was an element of “tiering” on the basis of parliamentary constituencies and also based on the deprivation indices. While there is significant deprivation in parts of Edinburgh, the local authority as a whole was relatively low on those criteria. Edinburgh was a Tier Three area and most of the awards went to Tier One areas, so we were a bit surprised but delighted.

“We do not know if there will be a Round Three but we are applying for Round Two, and are being mindful of the criteria and the spending deadlines. There is also a degree of pragmatism in looking again at the pipeline, the number of projects applied for and also what was ready.”

Mr Lawrence explained that in Round Two the UK Government had changed the guidelines allowing for councils to apply for up to £50 million to spend on cultural infrastructure of national importance which had not been provided for in the first round.

The Inch Park regeneration will have “huge amounts of community involvement” and is very “exciting” and is also supported by Ian Murray MP for Edinburgh South. The second bid relates to citywide cultural regeneration specifically brought together a bit late in the day to try and respond to the new fund guidance.

Mr Lawrence said that the officers had two things in mind when drafting the second bid. He said: “This is a national competition and so it should be possible for Edinburgh to demonstrate what the city needs to spend on its infrastructure to keep Edinburgh ahead of the game culturally and sustain the city’s local, national and international reputation.”

Officers looked at what would have an impact nationally and at community cultural projects, particularly in the most deprived communities. The portfolio of spending would be directed to the King’s Theatre, Leith Theatre, The Queen’s Hall and the Usher Hall, all of which are central to the cultural reputation as well as other projects in Wester Hailes and Pennywell.



The Queen's Hall 9 August 2020 during EIF My Light Shines On
PHOTO Martin P McAdam

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is not a competitive process, but an allocation being made by the UK Government to every local authority. There is a three year allocation from this fund to Edinburgh, relatively modest to begin with and rising towards the end of the period. There is also a possibility of working with neighbouring councils on a cross regional programme and that is being investigated.

The application has to be made to this fund by 1 August and councillors were asked to delegate authority to the Chief Executive along with the Council Leader and the Housing Convener, in view of council recess in July.

Cllr Kate Campbell lodged a motion asking for the details of a final investment plan to be prepared for all councillors to approve at an emergency meeting, and this was accepted by

Convener Cllr Jane Meagher. The next Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work committee meeting takes place on 4 August, and council officers are also asking the UK Government for a few days grace for councillors to approve the programme being put forward. The investment plan will set out more details of the way in which any investment will be targeted to areas of deprivation, setting outcomes which would help the council in tackling poverty.

Cllr Campbell said she felt it was important that for this amount of funding there should be an emergency meeting called if necessary and that the committee had the chance to agree the broad parameters of how this money is spent. Ahead of the meeting Cllr Campbell who was the previous Housing Convener had said: "I was shocked by the suggestion that this decision could be delegated just to the convener and council leader. Labour represent about 20% of the council and so to have such an important decision, about millions of pounds of spending, just sitting with two Labour councillors feels extremely anti-democratic.

"We put an amendment to demand that there should be an emergency committee if the extension is not given, so all councillors can scrutinise the plans."

Conservative councillor Iain Whyte said he had criticised bids made in Round One for not being ambitious enough and questioned whether enough was being done to develop future pipeline projects in case there is a Round Three. He also said that the culture and heritage bid for £50 million lacks financial detail and seemed "a bit unfocussed", questioning whether the bid meets the twin aims of that fund. He also highlighted that East Edinburgh appears to have been missed out and wondered where other funding might be sourced.

Paul Lawrence replied that the projects for which funding has been requested are those situated in areas where significant regeneration is underway, and will help to make projects there

bigger and more ambitious – such as the Granton Gasholder did last time. The Director of Place also confirmed there are other projects in the pipeline which could be proposed next time, but of course it is not yet known whether there will be more funding, and he repeated that the spending deadlines also affected the application. He reminded councillors that quite soon building will begin on the Dunard Centre which will be the first new concert hall for generations and which is funded by the UK and Scottish Governments as well as philanthropist Carol Grigor and the Dunard Fund.

Cllr Flannery asked how much the Edinburgh South Community Sports Club were involved in putting the bid together for the park and a council officer confirmed they were heavily involved, and still are. The LibDem councillor for Southside/Newington also asked about the football senior team which has now been elevated to the senior league and who will need a specific level of pitch to play on. The council officer explained that the community sports club have ambitions to create a match pitch but that will require quite a lot of infrastructure such as stands and changing rooms. There was difficulty in fitting all of that into the space available at Inch House, but the council has now agreed to create a full size all weather pitch for seniors and all the youth teams. The plans for that are currently being reviewed.

Cllr Stuart Dobbin asked about the projects for Wester Hailes and Craigmillar, but it was explained that no application has yet been made for these as they need some more work.

Green councillor Ben Parker asked about the citywide Active Travel project which was unsuccessful in the first round, and whether there might be funding found elsewhere. It was confirmed that the work on these projects in Wester Hailes and Craigmillar such as Niddrie Mains Road is quite advanced and that there is Scottish Government funding for active travel improvements.

Jeremy Balfour MSP has urged the council to make such applications to the fund. He said: "I am pleased to see the second round of the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund open up for bids.

"This fund has already helped to deliver millions worth of funding across Scotland so I would encourage The City of Edinburgh Council to ensure they bid for a share of this funding.

"The Levelling Up Funding can help make community projects in the Lothians a reality that local people have wished to see for years.

"It will also directly empower local authorities by directly giving the money to them, which is exactly what our councils need after years of savage SNP cuts to their budgets.

"The Levelling Up Funding can help our post-pandemic recovery in the Lothians and boost job opportunities.

"I hope that The City of Edinburgh Council will submit their bids over the next couple of weeks for projects to help rejuvenate communities."



In the first round of the Levelling Up Fund £16 million was awarded to refurbishing The Granton Gasholder. Photo: © 2021, Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com



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