

# **Gorgie Farm could have a new operator by next week**

**A new community organisation to run Edinburgh's crisis-hit Gorgie Farm could be agreed by next week, according to the council.**

The authority's education chief said talks are now progressing with a 'third party' – and blamed delays to the urban farm's re-opening on the previous operator.

Amanda Hatton said the third party – which is yet to be revealed – would work with a coalition of community groups, the council, and campaigners to secure a secure future for the council-owned attraction, which is currently closed to the public.

However the education and children's director added nothing has been finalised and options remain on the table to run it commercially – a move strongly opposed by the community.

A number of organisations had come forward to express an interest in taking on the farm, including Edinburgh Zoo, Five Sisters Zoo and East Links Family Park – and with all three being commercial operations it raised concerns people would be charged to visit the farm.

A local councillor stressed the farm "must be free to enter" as "it always has been" during its 40-year lifetime.



Gail Porter at Gorgie Farm. Photo Martin McAdam

Gates to the Gorgie Road site were locked shut this month after Love Learning announced the sudden closure amid financial difficulties attributed to the pandemic, rising cost of living and lack of funding including from the council.

Around 50 animals previously housed there have now been temporarily re-homed until a long-term solution is found, despite efforts by politicians and campaigners to keep them on site.

A report to the education, children and families committee on Tuesday (January 31) noted £150k of council funding had been identified to support the transition and said plans for a community-led organisation to take on Gorgie Farm is the “option which is being taken forward”.

It added negotiations stalled due to Love Learning failing to provide the council with “core information” needed to move things along.

However Ms Hatton told the committee progress had been made since the report was written.

“Last night we’ve received that information from Love so we’re now able to move forward with some of the information that the third party organisation needs,” she said.

“The third party has a board meeting next week, they have already got agreement in principle to move forward pending some of the further information which they required.

“So hopefully we’ll be in a position to move forward next week but it does depend on them being able to do the due diligence on the back of the information that came in late last night.”

Ms Hatton said a bold vision was needed for how the farm can be financially sustainable and “remain an asset for the community”.

Addressing the City Chambers meeting, Labour councillor for Gorgie and Dalry Ross McKenzie urged the council to “take responsibility”.

“It is the council that owns the land. It’s the council that kept the farm viable for 40 years,” he said.

He said the council had “jumped at the opportunity” to “wash our hands” of the farm in 2019 when Love took over “and pulled funding shortly after”.

Cllr McKenzie added: “Some claim that Love didn’t want that funding, and that may or may not have been the case when they took on the lease, but by the time they wrote to the convener of this committee, copying in the chief executive, and requesting an urgent meeting, they had left a trail of emails requesting council engagement.”

He said answers were needed “as to why that call wasn’t answered with the urgency that it clearly demanded”.

“But today, I think what’s important is that we recognise that regardless of who takes over the farm.”

*The campaign to save Gorgie Farm continues. We visited at the very last moment as [@LoveLearningFam](#) shut the gates with a view to handing back the keys to Edinburgh council. We spoke to people who hope it can still be turned around and saved for the city [pic.twitter.com/qy8Pi8n17w](https://pic.twitter.com/qy8Pi8n17w)*

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [January 16, 2023](#)