

Emergency motion to Save the Filmhouse may not have much scope

SNP councillors have tabled an emergency motion to Tuesday's meeting of the Policy and Sustainability Committee seeking "information" on the process to find a new operator for the Filmhouse.

But the view of the administrators is final in selling the building off. They have a legal obligation to maximise any assets of the company, and any details of negotiations must be confidential.

The Filmhouse came under the umbrella of the Centre for Moving Image and that charity fell into [administration](#) last year, meaning that the Filmhouse closed and staff became redundant. Tom MacLennan and Chad Griffin, partners with FRP Advisory, were appointed joint administrators in October last year.

The [motion](#) asks council officers to engage with Screen Scotland and the administrators to try and ensure the

Filmhouse remains the home of cultural cinema in Edinburgh.

But the response that The Edinburgh Reporter got from the joint administrators for CMI this afternoon is very much as expected.

A spokesman for the Joint Administrators said: “We have engaged significantly with multiple stakeholders in relation to the property sales process, including parties seeking the preservation of the building as a cultural cinema. Our legal duty is to maximise value to the Company and its creditors and we continue to work to conclude the property sales process shortly. Despite the speculation, the process is confidential and we are unable to comment further until its conclusion.

“Ever since the appointment for the Centre for the Moving Image (CMI), we have engaged with the creditors, trustees, interested parties, potential funders and various public bodies with an interest in the administration and more broadly arts and the city of Edinburgh. On cultural matters we prioritised the sale of the intellectual property relating to the Edinburgh International Film Festival, enabling the festival to be remounted in 2023. We have also overseen a project to archive a significant amount of cinematic materials for historical preservation, working with the National Library of Scotland. However, our overriding legal duty is to maximise value to the Company and its creditors.”

EMERGENCY COUNCIL MOTION

The motion reads:

“Committee notes that while the Council isn’t formally part of the decision making process, the Council does have a stake in making sure the cultural ecosystem of the City is retained and enhanced.

“Notes reports of discussions that the Filmhouse may be sold

by administrators for a non-cultural purpose following the administrator's preferred bidder reportedly withdrawing their bid.

"Further notes there were previous bids submitted in the previous competitive bid process which would have retained a cultural film presence on a sustainable commercial basis.

"Committee reiterates the Council's position in favour of retaining cultural film and film education as the central use for the Filmhouse.

"Committee agrees officers will engage with Screen Scotland, the Administrators and any potential bidders who can keep the Filmhouse as a centre of film culture in Edinburgh, to try and meet the City's expectations and protect Edinburgh's cultural landscape. Requests that the Convenor makes contact with the Administrators to reaffirm the Council's preferred position.

"Agrees that Officers will provide a briefing to all elected members no later than April 17th to update Councillors on the situation as known."

SNP councillors say they have previously made calls for the asset to be retained as a cultural and film hub and consistently pushed officers to work with others to achieve that outcome for the privately-owned building.

Reports of the successful bidder withdrawing from the process has led to severe concerns that the building may end up being sold for a commercial use with no cultural or cinema presence. At the weekend, protesters gathered calling for the building to remain in use as the centrepiece of independent and cultural film in the capital.

SNP Councillor Amy McNeese-Mechan said: "We all want to see this valuable cultural asset continue as the home of film in Edinburgh, despite the previous operator going out of business.

“We know that options came forward from viable operators who would run the venue successfully and sustainability as a hub of culture and the home of cinema in Edinburgh, not least from an impressive community bid backed by many in the Capital.

“We’re pushing hard to make sure the Administrators know the Council wants to see this asset remain the cultural ecosystem of the City and we’ll try and hard as we can to make that happen.”

2020 PLANS FOR A NEW FILMHOUSE

Just before the pandemic began the Filmhouse had unveiled plans to create a new £50 million Filmhouse building in Festival Square at what is the back door of the Sheraton Grand. At that time the then CEO, Ken Hay, said that the building had become entirely unsuited to being run as a cinema, explaining that “The building is not able to do what we need it to for ourselves or for our customers”.

This is the chat we had with Ken Hay on 11 March 2020 about developing a new contemporary home for Filmhouse where six cinema screens would be located below ground with an “iconic” festival centre above ground and a rooftop function space above a restaurant. Here he explains why a new home was then considered necessary.



The proposed new Filmhouse in Festival Square