

First woman appointed as Chair of Cockburn Association

Barbara Cummins will become the 21st Chair of the Cockburn Association at its AGM next week. This is the first time in the organisation's 148-year history that a woman has held this position.

Ms Cummins said: "It is an honour to be the new Chair of such an important Edinburgh civic body and to build on the work of my immediate predecessor, Cliff Hague. I am looking forward to working with the team, Trustees and wider stakeholders as well as getting to know the members better.

"This is an exciting time for the Cockburn as we approach the 150th anniversary and there will be much to reflect back on and celebrate. I also know I have big shoes to fill and many challenges ahead as Edinburgh continues to evolve in the face of global issues and local pressures. I know the Cockburn has an important role to play in helping to shape the future, as well as celebrating the past, of this unique city."



Ms Cummins is a Chartered Town Planner and a past Convener of the Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland. Until April 2021 she was Director of Heritage at Historic Environment Scotland where she led the functions responsible for planning, advice and consents, designations, World Heritage Sites and the HES archives.

She is the current Vice Chair of Planning Aid Scotland (PAS) and previously she worked in local government planning in a career spanning over 20 years. She led the Listed Buildings

and City Centre Development Management Teams at the City of Edinburgh Council until 2009.

Graduating from Queen's University in Belfast with a degree in Geography she came to Edinburgh to complete a Postgraduate Diploma in Town and Country Planning at Edinburgh College of Art/Heriot Watt University and then studied for an MBA at University of Edinburgh.

Professor Cliff Hague who is stepping down from the role after seven years taught generations of Scottish and international planners in Edinburgh College of Art / Heriot-Watt University, where for a time he was Head of the School of Planning and Housing. It is perhaps fitting then that his successor was once a student of his.

As chair Professor Hague was most concerned with the flouting of planning controls for events led activities such as the 2019 Christmas Market in East Princes Street Gardens which resulted in changes in the way the city uses its parks and green spaces.

He was opposed not to the mere idea of a new Ross Bandstand, but the detail and scale of it. When we interviewed him in 2020 about the Quaich Project he said: "We've always said that you could improve the gardens. I think we all recognise that there's been a long period of underinvestment, most particularly in the Bandstand, but also in the fountain. We welcome the philanthropic gift that kicked this off, and the work that was done on the Fountain.

"And we like other things in the project. We agree that what's called the red blaises area in the West End, the sort of children's play area bit over near St. Cuthbert's Church – that could be improved.

"We agree that the shelters could be improved. We've widely supported quite a lot of these aspects.

“The difficulties for us are really two or three concerns. and they’re all interrelated. One is the the scale of the new performance area arena. I know it’s said that this is for small performances, but my understanding is that it will more or less double the capacity of the existing Ross Bandstand.

“Linked to that is the intervention beneath Princes Street to create what’s been called the Welcome Centre. So together, we think there’s pretty major interventions, and they’re intrinsically disruptive. They’re going to take quite a long time to construct when there will be a mess basically, and they’re high end items that will require a lot of money and a lot of risk if you don’t raise that money or if you don’t bring in the income that you are anticipating.

“And our concern is that this then leads you into an overly commercialised solution, when what we think is that a pragmatic set of relatively small scale interventions could actually deliver an outcome that more or less everybody in the city would be supportive of.”

Since then [The Quaich Project](#) driven by a £5 million donation from Norman Springford the owner of Apex Hotels, has stalled. Our podcast about its progress up to April 2020 is below.