

Brass band spends £100,000 buying hall after community asset transfer falls through

St Davids Brass Band in Midlothian has bought the dilapidated Vogrie Hall in Gorebridge for £100,000 after a deal to take it over for just £1,000 fell through.

St David's Brass Band is a registered charity in Midlothian and previously leased Vogrie Hall for 12 years as its practice space.

The hall closed during Covid lockdown but when the opportunity came to apply to Midlothian Council for a Community Asset Transfer of the hall, they moved to agree a deal. Despite councillors agreeing the band should be able to take over the hall for just £1,000, it did not happen after concerns over conditions attached to the transfer were raised by the band.

Now the band has paid the local authority the full market value of £100,000 to own the hall outright and faces spending more than £500,000 to bring it back into a usable home for the band.

The hall was once at the heart of the Gorebridge community but has been left in a state of disrepair, with water leaking through its roof, fungal growth and a partial ceiling collapse.

Alistair Taylor, secretary of the brass band, said they had been disappointed that the community asset transfer did not go

ahead.

He said: "We had concerns about conditions that the council attached which meant if we sold the land and building at any time in the future for a purpose outwith the transfer use they would be entitled to 100% of the profit despite the band putting all the money into bringing it back to life.

"We repeatedly asked for talks to discuss alternatives to the conditions, which set off red flags with us, but were repeatedly ignored. Despite attempts to resolve the issue we were told the transfer deadline had passed and it was no longer on the table. In the end we decided to buy it outright, but every step forward for bringing it back to use has involved jumping through hoops for the council. We don't know why they have been so difficult, they should be glad we are willing to take it on in the dreadful state it has been allowed to fall into."

The council closed the hall two years ago after it was deemed unsafe and the band has been using alternative venues.

The band received two anonymous donations raising £300,000 towards setting up a permanent home which helped buy the hall and start planning for its refurbishment.

They have also received funding from the UK Government Levelling Up scheme and numerous trusts and foundations towards the work needed.

Fiona Dickson, from the band, said it was important to them to ensure donations were used for the benefit of the band saying: "The transfer conditions made us concerned those donations would end up going back to the council and we need to ensure that did not happen so buying the hall ended up the only option."

Midlothian Council said the transfer of the hall had been to allow it to be used as an 'expressive arts centre' and the conditions would only have meant that had it been sold for

another use the council would receive profits after the band recouped any investment it had made.

A spokesman said: "The council was in ongoing discussions with the applicant's legal representatives to negotiate the terms and conditions of transfer.

"The terms were reflective of the Community Empowerment Act 2015, in particular where the authority seeks to protect the asset when disposing at a discounted (less than market value) price.

"With regards change of use, the council would get 100% of the difference between a refurbished Vogrie Hall's value as an expressive arts and community centre and its value with the proposed change of use in place. Therefore, any investment made by the brass band was likely to be recouped by them."

More information on St Davids Brass band and how to donate to the hall fund can be found at stdavidsbrass.co.uk

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter

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The main hall at Vogrie Hall with collapsed ceiling, leaking roof and fungus growing on walls. Pic staff



Alistair Taylor and Fiona Dickson from St Davids Brass Band
outside Vogrie Hall, Gorebridge