

Calls to re-open Gorgie Farm 'as soon as possible'

A year on from its closure, an Edinburgh councillor has called for Gorgie Farm to be re-opened "as soon as possible", as it was revealed over £140,000 of public funds have been spent on improvements.

The urban farm was shut last February as previous operators Love Learning handed keys back to the council and the 50 animals – including sheep, pigs, snakes and lizards – were rehomed.

[Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council \(EVOOC\)](#) were subsequently appointed by the local authority to "support the transition and development of a community led solution" for the attraction and given £150,000 for the project.

One year on, local councillor Dan Heap said: "Gorgie Farm is a much-loved institution both in Gorgie and across the city and considerable public funds have been used so far to develop a new vision.

"The public rightly expect that new vision to include a plan to re-open the farm as soon as possible."

Cllr Heap, Greens representative for Sighthill/Gorgie, will table an amendment to that effect this week, which states "not re-opening the farm soon, even if only partially at first, would represent a significant reputation risk to the council".

He told the LDRS: "£141k has been spent and it's still closed –

we can't spend the best part of 150 grand and still have the doors closed."

The £141,530 expenditure to date is split between £88,230 on 'staffing', '£9,000 on 'activity costs', £7,400 on 'EVOC staff management/overhead costs and £36,900 on 'facilities costs'.

A blueprint on the future of Gorgie Farm is set to be unveiled by EVOC in July, but Cllr Heap pointed out as the organisation was using offices on the site and some local gardening groups had been granted access that "at least some of it must be safe".

He added as a result something "low maintenance" such as "a garden with chickens and ducks" should be made available to the public before the whole site re-opens eventually.

An update going to the council's culture and communities committee on Thursday, February 29, said there were "immediate maintenance issues requiring attention when EVOC took over the lease".

Among these were multiple burst pipes, replacement and repair of ceilings outside the toilets in the main building, deep clean, painting of offices in the main building, removal of high levels of different types of waste from site, ongoing pest control, pest related repairs and service and replacement of fire alarm parts, a report said.

"A full re-opening of the site will be dependent on the nature of the future model presented to the council as land owner. The current role of EVOC and the steering group is to establish if the farm is viable to reopen and develop a plan to support that if it is, and if not, to propose other models for consideration."

Cllr Heap's amendment said local councillors were declined a seat on the steering group, which includes representatives from EVOC, Edinburgh Social Enterprise, Volunteer Edinburgh, Edinburgh Zoo, the council, Health and Social Care Partnership and other local organisations and businesses.

If passed by the committee it will ask officers to "contact the steering group to request that a Sighthill/Gorgie

Councillor is able to join it, and any successor body”.

An initial public consultation on the farm’s future found that respondents “want to see an improved café area with a shop”.

The report said: “They would also like to see spaces the community can access and which organisations can use at low rent.

“People are looking for the site to bring education and training opportunities to the community whether this is through classes, volunteering, work placements, or skill development opportunities.

“Food was mentioned in a lot of the answers. This was related to gardening on the site as well as people sharing food, cooking together, and learning about food.”

It said “most people” want animals back on site but alongside “other activities and facilities”.

Meanwhile 41 per cent said they would be “willing to pay in some way”.

Any model which involved paid entry to the farm would “be done in a way that is not stigmatising or uncomfortable”.

However it was acknowledged that “not everybody could afford this” and the attraction would “remain free from the point of access”.

EVOC was contacted for comment.

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter



Gorgie City Farm