

After property marketed for sale council opens dialogue with Summerhall

Edinburgh Council will “open a dialogue” with the owners of Summerhall in a bid to ensure it is not lost as an arts centre.

The Southside venue – one of the city’s busiest during the Fringe – was put up for sale earlier this week, casting doubt over its future.

While managers say they are committed to Summerhall’s “long-term survival”, the property listing with CuthbertWhite states the former vet school offered “significant redevelopment” options including as a hotel, offices or student housing and this has exacerbated fears its days as a major cultural hub are numbered.

However the selling agents also state the building – which is home to over 110 businesses – is being sold with the current leases intact.

An emergency motion tabled by Edinburgh Council’s SNP group on Thursday and passed unanimously, highlighted the importance of the centre’s “role to the cultural fabric of Edinburgh as a capital city”.

Councillors agreed the local authority would “open a dialogue” with owners Oesselmann Estates Limited “to ascertain what support the city council can offer that would help secure the sustainability and future of Summerhall and its vibrant programme of events, community projects, visual arts and

exhibitions”.

A similar Green Group motion, also backed by all members of the culture and communities committee, added that any change of use of the venue would be a “severely negative development” but noted the recent effort to save the Filmhouse was a “welcome precedent”.

It requested that culture and communities convener Val Walker and council leader Cammy Day “meet urgently with the owners of the building to explore how they can ensure Summerhall continues to provide outstanding culture and events space, and homes to businesses”.

Meanwhile a petition to ‘preserve Summerhall as a cultural hub in Edinburgh’ has amassed almost 10,000 signatures in under a week.

Summerhall said its 2024 Fringe programme would go ahead as planned, and promised that any sale would “ensure the arts are front and centre of any decisions that may be made in the future”.

SNP councillor Finlay McFarlane, who tabled the emergency motion, said: “I am delighted that my emergency motion found unanimous political support at committee. As when the Filmhouse entered difficulties it is vital that we are using our civic voice to express the cultural importance of Summerhall remaining a centre for community and the arts.

“Any potential future owner of Summerhall should be playing close attention to the outpouring of support and strength of public feeling about its future.

“The motion also means that our council officers can start a dialogue to establish any ways in which we can contribute to support the tenant organisations and play our part in planning for a long-term sustainable future.

“In the meantime, Summerhall is open for business and the best way we can practically all rally around it is to visit, buy a coffee or tickets to their fantastic upcoming Fringe season. I know I will be!”

Cllr Day said: "I was disappointed to see the news that Summerhall is set to be sold and I understand the concern for the future of this well-loved cultural institution.

"We're monitoring the situation closely and will continue to do so alongside our partners. I'm encouraged to see that this matter will also be raised by the Member for Edinburgh East with the Scottish Government.

"We remain in dialogue with the operators and have an emergency meeting in place to discuss these new developments.

"We're committed to preserving and enhancing the capital's wider cultural sector going forward and the Summerhall site forms an important part of this."