

# **New 'Gorgie Community Farm' plan unveiled but with no animals**

**Plans to re-open Edinburgh's Gorgie Farm have been unveiled – but do not include returning animals to the site.**

The popular attraction, which has been closed for 18 months, is set to take on a new life as 'Gorgie Community Farm' if councillors approve a new vision next week.

Continuing the farm's 40-year tradition, it would remain free for the public to visit.

Early proposals include spaces for growing, outdoor play, community enterprises, markets and "partnership working around community need".

A new charity, Gorgie Farm Company, has been set up to develop a business case and run the site, although other organisations wishing to express an interest in operating it will be invited.

However the wide variety of animals previously enjoyed by visitors – from lizards to alpacas – will not return.

Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council (EVOC), which was appointed to develop a community-led model for the farm, was advised by Edinburgh Zoo chief executive David Field the site "does not meet current legislative standards for animal holdings and welfare".

A report said the cost of the project would range from £1.5m to £4.6m depending on how much additional building work is proposed.

The option put forward for approval includes a commitment to only ever have 'small animals on site that contribute to the land, such as chickens and goats'

But this would only be a possibility "once the new company has been operating for five years and it is solvent and sustainable," a report said.

"In the current financial position, it has been shown that it is not possible to adhere to required legislative requirements... therefore, the options for the immediate and medium-term future of the farm does not contain animals.

"During its various iterations animals on site have included horses, cows, pigs, small pets, chicken, ducks, alpacas and many more. Despite this deep affection for animals, which undoubtedly contributes to the strong love for the site, numerous challenges with animals have been faced including feeding and veterinary costs, welfare issues, sickness and disease and predation by wild animals."

It added: "The preferred option for the future of the site is a 'Community Farm', a place that supports use of the farm site for growing, outdoor play, community enterprises, markets and partnership working around community need. This Farm grows relationships, grows opportunities, and grows local business."

EVOC said it was vital the farm is a "free to access public amenity," and to lose the site as a community space "would be a physical representation of the loss and sacrifice many are feeling right now with the cost of living and energy crisis".

The phased re-opening, which does not yet have a timeline, would provide a number of "opportunities for revenue income" including pop-up markets, a café and community activity space,

community kitchen facilities and crofting land.

Locals were left gutted at the start of last year after previous farm operators, Love Gorgie Farm, shut the gates and handed the keys back to the council, which owns the site.

The animals were then transported to local zoos and farms as the local authority came under pressure to ensure Gorgie Farm was not lost forever.

EVOC were then given £150,000 to draw up the new plans, which will go before Edinburgh Council's culture and communities committee for approval next Thursday, August 8.

Meanwhile, a fire ripped through the farm's stables last week and a 14-year-old male has since been charged with wilful fire raising.

The report said fire services attended "swiftly" but a full assessment of the "damage and impact that this has on the use of the site in the short term" had not yet been completed.

Gorgie councillor Ross McKenzie said: "There is no damage to the office building. This is a great relief. I look forward to seeing proposals for the future of Gorgie Farm when they are presented to committee. I'm awaiting a response from the police on the general issue of fire-raising in the area."

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter