

# **Exhibition will mark 100 years since important city architect appointed in Edinburgh**

**To mark the centenary of Ebenezer James MacRae being appointed as City Architect in Edinburgh, SNP planning spokesperson, Cllr Neil Gardiner, proposed that the date is marked with an exhibition at the People's Story museum.**

Mr MacRae became City Architect in 1925, adding the role of Director of Housing the following year, and he led Edinburgh's vast building programme of council houses during the interwar period, remaining in post until 1946. He is widely regarded as having transformed the face of the city by designing and building council estates across the city, the vast majority of which still survive today.

MacRae's works include Prestonfield, Stenhouse, Redbraes, Saughton, Whitson, Craigentenny, Granton and Craigmillar, with Piershill often cited as his masterpiece. MacRae and his team were also responsible for designing and delivering sensitive urban social housing renewal in the Old Town and South Side. In addition MacRae was also responsible for designing the city's police boxes.

The need for the large-scale construction of new council

schemes gained acceptance following the sacrifices of the First World War, and a recognition that soldiers returning from the horrors of the Western Front – and their families – deserved “homes fit for heroes”. Many working class families in Edinburgh were living packed into unsanitary and unsafe slums in places like the Old Town and Southside.

MacRae, with his commitment to good space standards and natural daylighting, set out to build municipal housing for Edinburgh’s working class which would vastly improve their health and life chances. [Thousands of Edinburgh citizens](#) still benefit from his vision.

Cllr Gardiner’s proposal has been approved by councillors today. Council officers will now start preparing an exhibition of MacRae’s work at the People’s Story museum in the Canongate Tolbooth in 2025. The museum [was given a last minute reprieve](#) from temporary closure only yesterday.

Cllr Gardiner, who is a former convener of the city’s Planning Committee and is himself a qualified architect, said: “Few people have had such a lasting and positive impact on Edinburgh’s cityscape as Ben MacRae. He achieved what he set out to do – enabling thousands of Edinburgh’s poorest households to move out of squalid slums into high quality, healthy council housing.

“Residents will have their own favourites; for me 76 Grassmarket, which is above the “Last Drop” pub means a lot to our own family, as that was where my mother-in-law was born. This building which sensitively reuses the original staircase from an tenement built in 1634, was rebuilt by MacRae in 1929-30.

“It’s absolutely right that the Council marks his contribution to the city on this centenary. And there is no better place to do that than in Edinburgh’s museum of working class history, the People’s Story.

“I hope other parties will support this proposal and the SNP’s efforts to get the People’s Story reopened without delay.”



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