

New company set to take on 25-year lease of Gorgie City Farm

A new company is set to take on a 25-year lease of Gorgie City Farm, after successfully bidding to run the much-loved community farm which closed to the public two years ago.

Gorgie Community Farm Ltd is the preferred operator from four bids made to the council, and its finance and resources committee is expected to approve the decision when it meets next week.

The company, which was formed to manage and run the site, promised to ensure the farm would remain “a functioning asset to which the community will enjoy access”.

This would initially be through the creation of volunteer community gardens and allotments as well as community events, community art and a children’s playarea.

The group admitted last year that, if successful, returning any animals – previously the most popular element of the free attraction – would not be possible for several years due to costs.

The council also set down conditions that the farm should be inclusive of everyone, including local groups and residents; that buildings and property will be maintained and managed; and that there would be full engagement and transparency with

the local community.

Gorgie Community Farm Ltd say their vision is to have “a sustainable, inclusive and community driven facility that enhances the well-being of local residents through collaboration, education and social inclusion”.

They intend to run community workshops and events, starting from February, with the intention of opening a coffee kiosk and children’s play space by May this year.

The new tenants will be entirely responsible for maintenance and they say they plan to work with other organisations to help with costs.

From the start, they will be partnering with another Community Interest Company – Edinburgh Forge – which provides woodwork and metalwork tools, facilities and training to people from all walks of life.

Edinburgh Forge will relocate to Gorgie from their current base in Fountainbridge and the new space will allow them to offer adults and youths the chance to engage in “hands-on creativity in woodworking, metal working and other crafts”.

Gorgie Community Farm is already in discussions with other potential partners and they expect renting space to be a major part of their income in the future, gradually allowing them to reduce reliance on grants.

The existing board of Gorgie Community Farm has three members although it aims to increase this to five.

They have one part-time member of staff but hope to recruit a development manager and facilities manager in full-time roles, with additional part time/volunteer/seasonal support.

The farm – which was once home to animals including goats, alpacas, rabbits, ferrets, and guinea pigs – has faced ongoing financial difficulties, particularly in the wake of the Covid

pandemic.

The report to members makes clear the scale of the challenge facing the new company, which will take on the responsibility for £5 million of work that is needed to make necessary repairs to the building.

The report states: "It is clear that there are substantial risks to the proposal, particularly around the capital investment required to deliver the vision of a community farm.

"However, the GCF submission does demonstrate that a sustainable partnership approach could provide a successful community facility."

If approved next week, the terms and conditions of the lease agreement will be concluded by the council's Interim Executive Director of Place.

By Kirsty Paterson Local Democracy Reporter