

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 5 October 2023

WASPS – 2/3 West Park Place

Executive/routine
Wards

Executive
7- Sighthill/Gorgie

Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Culture and Communities Committee notes the information provided in response to the motion by Councillor Heap on WASPS Studio Space in Dalry.

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

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Report

WASPS – 2/3 West Park Place

Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report responds to a motion by Councillor Heap, which was approved by the Culture and Communities Committee on [11 May 2023](#).

Background

- 3.1 On 11 May 2023, the Culture and Communities Committee approved a motion by Councillor Heap on WASPS Studio Space in Dalry which stated:-
- “Committee
1. Notes that WASPS provides studio spaces for artists and creatives and operates a studio space at West Park Place in Dalry.
 2. Understands that WASPS wrote to ward councillors indicating it is examining the future of the space in light of what it states are high costs of maintenance.
 3. Is given to understand that the building had previously been purchased from the City of Edinburgh Council.
 4. Notes with regret the under provision of arts facilities in Dalry and believes the studio is an integral part of the cultural scene in this part of the city.
 5. Requests a report be submitted in two cycles of the Culture and Communities Committee covering (1) The details of any sale of the property by the City of Edinburgh Council and (2) What can be done to support WASPS to keep their studio provision at West Park Place or within the Gorgie/Dalry area.
 6. Requests the Convener to contact WASPS and representatives of the tenants at West Park Place to discuss what can be done to retain the thriving artistic community at West Park Place in Dalry.”
- 3.2 This report responses to the above motion.

Main report

Details of the Sale

- 4.1 On 2 February 1995, the former Edinburgh District Council Policy and Resources Committee approved a report for the acquisition of a property 2/3 West Park Place for £150,000 and that it be leased to WASPS for a period of 25-years at a rent of £20,000 per annum. It also approved that, at the end of the lease, WASPS had the right to acquire ownership of the property for £1.
- 4.2 WASPS implemented their right to purchase at the end of the lease with the sale completing in April 2021. While the Council was legally obliged to sell property unconditionally for £1, WASPS were asked to enter into a voluntary arrangement whereby the Council had some protection against a quick onward sale for profit (something that was not considered in 1995). The outcome was a condition in the sale contract which stated that if the property was sold, within 10-years from the date of sale, and the proceeds not invested in artist accommodation in Edinburgh, the Council could claw-back 50% of the sale price.

Support for WASPS for retaining West Park Place or in the Gorgie Dalry Area

- 4.3 The Convenor visited West Park Studios and met with artists there on two separate occasions and has also met with senior representatives of WASPS.
- 4.4 During these visits, it was clear that the building is structurally compromised, is not fully accessible, and safe use was becoming severely restricted and impractical.
- 4.5 WASPS outlined their change management plan of providing alternative fit-for-purpose studio accommodation that all the artists currently housed in West Park Place would be relocated and could tailor to their own model of use.
- 4.6 While the aspiration was to secure a property within a reasonable distance, WASPS were not in a position at the time to name the new site given commercial terms of acquisition.

Current Position

- 4.7 On 10 August 2023, WASPS wrote to the Convenor providing an update. The letter is attached as Appendix 1.
- 4.8 The letter confirms that WASPS have secured an interest in the former office building at Riverside House, Gorgie Road where they intend to relocate the artists from West Park Place. The existing facility will eventually be sold with the proceeds invested in Riverside House.

Next Steps

- 5.1 This report responds to a motion for information and there are currently no next steps required.

Financial impact

6.1 This report has no financial impact on the Council.

Equality and Poverty Impact

7.1 There are no Council actions arising from this report.

Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

8.1 There are no Council actions arising from this report.

Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

9.1 There are no Council actions arising from this report.

Background reading/external references

10.1 None.

Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1 – Letter from WASPS to the Convenor of Culture and Communities of 10 August 2023.



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Private and confidential

New Gorgie Road studios

Dear Councillor,

I hope you are well. Wasps' Chief Executive Officer Audrey Carlin is on leave just now, but I know she was keen for Wasps to keep you updated on developments at West Park Place. I was privileged to take over as Chair in March and having met tenants in person, I am well aware of the strength of feeling and the emotional attachment to a building that has served us well for so many years.

To recap, at the request of tenants we commissioned a second independent survey which confirmed our worst fears regarding the condition of the building, to the extent that we are having to undertake emergency remedial work.

During our consultations, we were open in admitting that, as a charity, we cannot afford the £4million needed to bring West Park Place up to standard in terms of structural condition, accessibility and energy efficiency. As we depend solely on rents to pay maintenance and running costs and there is no subsidy funding available, this would necessitate an unacceptable rise in rents.

Of our limited options, the preference of our trustees was to move to a new sustainable home, where our artists and makers can prosper and thrive, but finding studio space in Edinburgh is difficult. Wasps is running at 100% occupancy with a seven-year waiting list. And although we identified a potential new home some time ago, negotiations have been protracted and complex.

From our forums with tenants, our 1-1 meetings, our calls and emails, we acknowledge the stress and anxiety caused by this period of uncertainty. So, we are pleased to say that, although a deal has not been formally concluded, we are confident we will be in a position to open new studios at Riverside House on Gorgie Road – just 1.5 miles from West Park Place and still in the heart of the community.

A more modern building, Riverside House is easier to maintain and run, fully compliant with today's fire and environmental standards and offers space for exhibition and community use. Unlike West Park Place, Riverside House is accessible for all. It has good transport links, sitting on a main bus route, as well as car parking. It has good transport links, sitting on a main bus route, as well as car parking.

The Gorgie Road building offers us a blank canvas – an opportunity for artists and makers to conceive and mould studios and spaces fit for the future. As we promised, we will work with you in partnership on the design and facilities as well as the logistics of the move to Riverside.

So, today we are writing to all tenants to inform them of the Gorgie Road development and, as a first step, inviting four representatives on to a small working group comprising Wasps staff and architects for an initial meeting and tour of the building. This collaborative approach will help us meet tenants' needs with the fit-out of the studios, design of communal or community space and the organisation of the move.

For the moment, we cannot provide details on the timetable for a move. But we hope to provide more clarity after the site visit, further discussions with tenants on their requirements and the formal legal conclusion of the acquisition of Riverside House. I acknowledge that there has been some misinformation or misunderstanding surrounding the challenges at West Park Place. Please understand that our priority is to keep it open at all costs until our Gorgie Road premises are ready.

All profits from the sale West Park Place will be reinvested into artists' provision in the community. We are a not-for-profit charity with a board comprising unpaid Trustees, so the only beneficiaries from any sale of West Park Place will be artists and the local community.

In 1995 the then Edinburgh District Council agreed to lease West Park Place to Wasps, with an option to purchase at the end of the 25 years for £1. In 2021, Wasps exercised that option and took over the building. As part of the agreement Wasps gave a commitment that all profits from any sale will be reinvested to support art in the Edinburgh community. We will honour that commitment through our redevelopment of Riverside House into a thriving home for the arts at the heart of the community.

I hope you find this update useful and take some reassurance that we are working in the best interests of not just this generation of artists and makers, but of future generations. If you have any questions or observations, I would be delighted to hear from you.

Kindest regards,

Karen Anderson
Chair, Wasps