

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 5 December 2024

Gorgie Farm, 51 Gorgie Road, Edinburgh

Executive/routine
Wards

Routine
7 – Sighthill/Gorgie

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Culture and Communities Committee is asked to note:
 - 1.1.1 The position regarding the continued closure of Gorgie Farm and the reasons for this course of action, for the immediate period;
 - 1.1.2 That the expression of interest process has been completed and that a report seeking approval for a preferred operator will be considered by Finance and Resources Committee on 16 January 2025; and
 - 1.1.3 That the Council will work with the preferred operator to secure an opening/partial opening of the site as soon as is practical following Finance and Resources Committee.

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Report

Gorgie Farm, 51 Gorgie Road, Edinburgh

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Gorgie Farm has been closed following termination of the lease to Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council (EVOG). A number of parties have expressed interest in creating a community farm on the site. For security and health and safety reasons it is considered prudent that the farm remains closed for a further short period of time before a preferred operator is approved.

3. Background

- 3.1 On 8 November 2025, the City of Edinburgh Council approved the following motion in relation to Gorgie Farm: Council
- 3.1.1 Notes that it has expressed the view that Gorgie Farm should re-open, even if only partially, as soon as possible.
- 3.1.2 Regrets that neither the public nor even volunteer gardening group, the latter of which had access until recently, can access the farm
- 3.2 Council further notes:
- 3.2.1 That, on October 3, the Culture and Communities Committee [unanimously made the following requests:](#)
- 3.2.1.1 A note within one week explaining why the whole site is not currently safe and why not even the garden areas cannot be safely accessed.
- 3.2.1.2 That Council will take the necessary steps to make site safe at the earliest opportunity, so that volunteers are able to return to the garden area.
- 3.2.1.3 That the next stage of the bid process for the farm will make clear that the Council's expectation is that any part of the site that can be safely opened to volunteers and to the public will be opened without delay after the lease is awarded.
- 3.2.1.4 That a briefing note issued to the Culture and Communities Committee:
- (a) In respect of 3(a), did not explain why the garden areas cannot be safely accessed.

- (b) In respect of 3(b), did not indicate what steps can be taken to make the site safe, to allow the return of volunteers
- (c) In respect of 3(c), appeared to suggest this would not be progressed.

3.3 Council therefore:

3.3.1 Requests a report to the December meeting covering the following:

- 3.3.1.1 The safety information referred to in 3(a);
- 3.3.1.2 A plan to realise the aim referred to in 3(b);
- 3.3.1.3 A plan to realise the aim referred to in 3(c);
- 3.3.1.4 Cost and resources required to realise 3 b) and how that will be managed so that volunteers are able to return to the garden at the earliest opportunity; and
- 3.3.1.5 Recognises that there are practical and financial implications to reopening the site safely at this stage. Agrees to refer the motion to Finance and Resources Committee.

3.4 On 8 August 2024, Culture and Communities Committee considered a [report](#) outlining an options analysis for Gorgie Farm and approved that Option C (as set out in paragraphs 4.4.3 – 4.7 of that report) was the Council's preferred approach for this site and that expressions of interest to operate a community farm on the site should be invited. The outcome of this exercise to be reported to a future committee.

4. Main report

Safe opening of the site, and specifically the garden area

- 4.1 Following the decision of Committee on 3 October 2024, consideration has been given to the options to safely reopen the site and specifically the garden area to allow volunteers to continue with their work.
- 4.1 There are three main reasons why it is recommended that the whole site remains closed:
 - 4.2.1 There is no current resource within the security service to allow the volunteers to access the site. Given the condition of the site, the Council could not accept the risk of permitting the volunteers to enter the site unsupervised, nor could access be given to allow the volunteers to disable on-site security measures;
 - 4.2.2 Increased security measures have been introduced on the site for safety and to protect it from future risk of vandalism. This is in the form of a PID alarm system which monitors the whole site. Due to the site layout, in order to provide maximum protection, the position of the units means that access to the garden site will trigger the alarm system. Consequently, if volunteers were to access the site on a regular basis, this would require the whole system is disabled and then re-enabled when volunteers have left the site.

Whilst this is practical on an infrequent basis for ad-hoc visits (e.g. contractors), it is challenging to manage for more regular access; and

4.2.3 Due to the upcoming winter period, services have been turned off to the site to minimise any potential risk of frozen pipes. This means that there would be no water facilities (including bathroom facilities) available to volunteers or members of the public when visiting the site.

4.3 If the Council wishes to proceed with reopening the site safely, the practical challenges relate to control of access and the operation of the PID alarm system as well as the availability of washing and toilet facilities. These would also have financial implications which are not currently budgeted. In addition, site access in the current circumstances may also have financial implications for the Council's insurance costs.

Steps to make the site safe to open to the public

4.4 The Council's Health, Safety and Risk team have inspected the site and have indicated that the works required to allow the site to safely reopen would include the following:

4.4.1 The cobbled paths throughout the site have varying levels of vegetation growth on and around them. This is creating a potential trip hazard in areas and are also preventing other ground conditions hazards from being observed. These would require to be cleared;

4.4.2 There are instances of onsite electrical fittings which are not secured and in some cases are damaged, these would need repaired, made secure and safe before any electrical appliances could be used;

4.4.3. There are buildings on the site which have been subject of extensive fire damage, these areas are currently fenced off using Heras fencing. While this is sufficient while the site is open to volunteers, it would not prevent unauthorised access into dangerous areas (as the fencing can be moved) and is unlikely to be under the close supervision by the Council. Therefore, further work would be required to secure the Heras fencing to the building to prevent unauthorised access;

4.4.4 The main building in the centre of the site is accessible from the top of the site. Part of this building has been vandalised. Works are required to secure and restrict access to the main building, there is broken glass which requires attention, and, like the café area, this building would require a review of the water system. The electrical system and any portable items would require to be subject of portable appliance testing. The general condition of the building would need to be reviewed, along with a review of asbestos surveys;

4.4.5 There is a set of wooden steps leading from the vegetable growing area up to a higher level of the site. Some of the steps here have deteriorated in condition with extensive vegetation growth and some large broken pot

fragments all of which could contribute to a trip incident with more significant consequences. The steps should be repaired and cleared before use;

4.4.6 The area with greenhouses within the site is overgrown, like other parts, with potentially hidden trip hazards including extended hose pipes. The green houses are in a varying degree of repair with glass panels missing or loose. The metal framed green house is lopsided and one side may present a risk of collapse. There are glass panels in this green house. It is recommended that use of the green houses is restricted until a more detailed inspection and any remediation is completed to make them safe; and

4.4.7 Water systems on site to be used would need to be reviewed to establish the measures necessary to manage any legionella risk; this should include the water bouser units at the top of the site adjacent to the railway line.

4.5 A conservative estimate of the costs to undertake the works outlined would be in the region of £50,000 .

Expectation that the site can be safely reopened to the public without delay as soon as the lease is awarded

4.6 In accordance with the decision of Committee on 8 August 2024, Estates officers have conducted a process of seeking of interest to create a community farm.

4.7 The opportunity was advertised with a request that notes of interest were submitted by a closing date of 30 September 2024. Five notes of interest were received. Meetings were held with each of the parties to review initial proposals prior to submitting a date for final detailed submissions of 22 November 2024.

4.8 At the final closing date four submissions were received. These submissions will now be assessed and a recommendation for a lease to the preferred operator will be presented to Finance and Resources Committee on 16 January 2025.

4.9 Discussions will take place with the preferred operator, subject to Committee approval for the proposed lease, regarding the possibility of early volunteer and/or public access to the site once they are identified. Officers will work with the preferred operator on developing a robust plan for the reopening of the site and to identify any early works which the operator may seek to undertake in order to deliver their proposals for the site. This will incorporate the health and safety issues outlined in paragraph 4.4 above. It is anticipated that the operator will be allowed access to the site under a licence while the formal lease is put in place.

5. Next Steps

5.1 A report will be presented to Finance and Resources Committee on 16 January 2025 seeking approval to award a lease to the preferred operator.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Due to the relatively short period before approval for the preferred operator will be sought from the Finance and Resources Committee, and with the aim that some form of access to farm can be put in place quickly thereafter, it is not considered prudent to allocate unbudgeted financial resources to any works at this time.
- 6.2 As noted above, a conservative estimate of the costs to make the site safe is in the region of £50,000 which is unbudgeted.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 The impact of the decision to close Gorgie Farm on the health and wellbeing of the volunteers who had previously worked with EVOC to tend the gardens is recognised and accepted. Council officers have sought to mitigate these impacts by securing a gardening opportunity at Saughton.
- 7.2 A full Integrated Impact Assessment will be prepared when the outcome of the expression of interest has been finalised and will form part of the report to Finance and Resources Committee.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 There is no immediate environmental impact to this report but the process to secure an operator to create a community farm will enable conditions for the future capital development of the site which will result in more energy efficient buildings with facilities and building management resources that are compliant with net zero ambitions.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 There is an ongoing risk to the site remaining closed which is mitigated in the immediate term by the security measures that have been put in place.
- 9.2 In the short term it is considered that risk is best mitigated by securing an operator who has a robust business plan for reopening the farm, even in phases.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 None.

11. Appendices

None.