

North Edinburgh Arts secures Scottish Land Funds

18th September 2020

As part of the ongoing regeneration programme around MacMillan Square, North Edinburgh Arts (NEA) has secured £156,000 from the Scottish Land Fund. One of only two successful bids in Edinburgh, the funds will enable the charity to buy the land and building recently agreed as a community asset transfer from the City of Edinburgh Council. With the purchase of an additional plot of land to the north of the organisation's venue, NEA will work in partnership with the Council to deliver a community and neighbourhood hub which promotes culture, learning, work and wellbeing for this area of the city. This will include a new early years centre, library, affordable homes as well as an extension to and refurbishment of the existing NEA building.

Bringing the organisation, established in 1998, into community ownership and working to extend the facilities will make sure this dynamic community venue is fit for purpose for the next two decades. New enterprise, workshop, learning space and creative studios are planned, alongside a dedicated youth area, expanded café, and shared atrium all working to complement the Council's adjoining library and early year's provision.

NEA carried out extensive consultation to gauge support for the project with 96% of respondents in favour. The organisation offers local residents a place to relax, explore, learn, meet, share, volunteer and have fun in. Last year over 40,000 visits were made to the venue once described by STV as 'a bright bubble behind Muirhouse shopping centre'. NEA is working with Richard Murphy Architects, and Council colleagues, to make sure the new hub is inspiring, inviting and innovative, and bring a high quality facility to the newly formed MacMillan Square.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic over 30 hours of creative workshops were on offer each week, most with a family focus, alongside a wide range of other events from singing groups to circus skills workshops, exhibitions, community theatre, film clubs, and festival events. The venue is also home to Muirhouse Link Up, North Edinburgh Drug and Alcohol Centre, and the Tinderbox Orchestra, all working to serve the most disadvantaged children, families and individuals in the North Edinburgh area.

Chair of NEA, Lesley Hinds, said: "NEA has won five national awards in the last six years for place making and creative projects. This new capital project will allow the organisation to flourish, alongside Council provision. NEA is a special place for the community of North Edinburgh and has been a trusted community anchor providing emergency food, support, materials and online creative activities throughout the lockdown. Alongside our COVID activity of the last five months we have been working closely with partners to share and establish our vision of a welcoming and innovative creative hub for the next generation of North Edinburgh residents. The granting of the Scottish Land Fund is an important and welcome next step on this exciting journey."

Director Kate Wimpres added "The bright blue NEA building has been a beacon of hope for many throughout the lockdown, and an important part of the North Edinburgh landscape over the last decade. Today's endorsement from the Scottish Land Fund, following on from the Council's agreement for this much loved and used asset to come fully into community ownership, takes NEA , and our community, another step closer to our vision becoming a reality. We are looking forward to building a first class facility fit for purpose for today, and for the years to come"

City of Edinburgh Council Leader, Adam McVey, said: “We’ve been working with the local community to make neighbourhood improvements, build some of the best new housing in all of Edinburgh and create facilities which will benefit everyone who calls Pennywell home. It has been one of our most ambitious regeneration projects in Edinburgh for decades and one of Scotland’s largest too. Yet none of it would be possible without the input and support of the people and organisations in the local area.

“North Edinburgh Arts is a great example of this and is so important for the cultural vibrancy of the neighbourhood. We’re excited for our community asset transfer and to partner with them on this next stage of Pennywell’s regeneration. The funding boost is welcome news and the money will help us as we deliver a community and neighbourhood hub which promotes culture, learning, work and wellbeing. This will include a new early years centre and library, even more affordable homes plus improvements to the existing North Edinburgh Arts building to benefit everyone.”

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