

FAQs

Modernising Edinburgh Zoo



GENERAL Qs

1. WHY DO YOU NEED TO UNDERTAKE THIS LAND SALE AND EXCHANGE?

These proposals give us the chance to address some of the continuing issues we have that are affecting the way in which we operate and opportunities to grow the reputation and presence of Edinburgh Zoo. To do this we need to:

- address our inadequate and antiquated infrastructure;
- release capital to permit investment in our infrastructure;
- address the unsuitable (for zoo development) nature of surplus, existing land holdings;
- meet disabled access and health and safety requirements in relation to the acceptable maximum slope gradient;
- create separate routes for pedestrian and vehicles; and,
- increase and improve the range and quality of attractions in line with our growing visitor expectations and our aspirations.

2. WHAT CONCERNS DO PEOPLE HAVE ABOUT THE POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT AND LAND EXCHANGE?

RZSS is very fortunate to have an active local community and has been meeting with Friends of Corstorphine Hill and their local Councillor regularly to keep them informed of progress. As we are not at the planning stage yet, we are still considering our options in relation to developers and we are still discussing arrangements with the Council about the land to be exchanged.

Obviously, as the Zoo is in a green belt area we would not want to undertake a project that would harm or be unsuitable for the surroundings. However, the opportunity presents itself to significantly improve the Zoo for our visitors and our animals. We must grasp this otherwise the future of our organisation and location could be under threat.

For some, news of housing development is not particularly welcome but it is not in our interest to permit a development to go ahead without being confident that it will be suitable for the area.

3. THE ZOO IS THE SECOND MOST POPULAR PAID FOR ATTRACTION IN EDINBURGH, WHY DO YOU NEED TO CHANGE THE SITE?

To ensure Edinburgh Zoo remains appealing and is perceived good value for money then it is essential to continually upgrade and improve what is on offer to visitors. This is particularly important for regular visitors and members who will look for staff to continually provide something new or respond to customer feedback about improvements needed. It has long been identified that an uncomfortable conflict exists between vehicles and people in the park.

As a window on the world of animal conservation, accessibility remains an issue. We feel we have reached a point where we can no longer do what is needed within the confines of our current boundaries.

4. TRAFFIC CONGESTION ON BUSY HOLIDAYS CAN BE A PROBLEM – WHAT ARRANGEMENTS WILL BE MADE TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE?

We are aware of the problems a sunny day in the holidays can cause to the flow of traffic in and around Corstorphine and to the visitor experience once inside the Zoo. Our plans hope to address this issue in three ways.

Firstly, through infrastructure improvements we plan to make the Zoo an all year round attraction. At the moment many of our visitors will only come to the Zoo when the weather is good; by providing a greater range of facilities, some of which undercover, we will not be so weather dependent.

Secondly, we will be able to bring in smart ticketing options where we can provide price incentives to encourage visitors to come on days or at times when the Zoo is not at its busiest.

Thirdly, working with Lothian Regional Travel and the Council (linked to the City’s transport strategy) we are encouraging our visitors to consider alternative methods to traveling to the Zoo by car. We have publicised these in our marketing materials, such as on specially branded buses, extended our car parking charge to our members and undertaken incentive-based tickets with public transport providers (for example children go free with First Scot Rail).

Our plans do not intend to cram more visitors into the Zoo at busy times but to extend both our appeal and the options available at quieter times and in ‘shoulder’ months.

LAND EXCHANGE ON THE EAST SIDE OF EDINBURGH ZOO

1. THE PROPOSED LAND EXCHANGE – WHAT AREA DOES THIS TAKE UP AND WHY IS THE LAND FURTHER UP THE HILL USUABLE?

The land at the top of the hill is unusable without significant finances to address the uneven nature of the land and the level of gradient. The area to the east owned by the Council would permit RZSS to create an S-shaped access road at a gradient in line with health and safety requirements. The exact size is under discussion but at the moment the land required is about 1.37 ha and the land given in return would be 1.88ha.

RZSS has always worked with the local community to assist in any work they have wanted to undertake. If the land exchange goes ahead then we will work with Friends of Corstorphine Hill to improve areas for better public access and wildlife enhancement. Our community involvement will not stop if this land exchange and development proposal doesn’t proceed.

2. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR BOTH PARTIES?

Edinburgh Zoo

Securing major investment without recourse to the Council or Scottish Government.

Preserving the Zoo as a major visitor attraction.

Corstorphine Hill

Increased land for Corstorphine Hill nature reserve.

Increased land around access pinch point at

Securing compliance with Health & Safety and the Disability Discrimination Act requirements.

Enabling investment to support and bring new attractions such as the giant pandas.

Supporting the Zoo's on-going conservation, education and research work.

Improving the quality of the Zoo experience for visitors and members.

Potential creation of a 'window on local conservation'.

Safeguards the Zoo's 300 jobs and secondary spend in the local economy.

'Rest and Be Thankful'.

Improved public access through the creation of an improved path network.

Entire badger habitat under a single ownership, with the potential development of greater interaction with the public.

Improved biodiversity, with the experience of local access to the expertise of the IUCN secretariat.

The potential creation of new formal viewing points adjacent to the Zoo and at the top of Corstorphine Hill.

Investment in improved infrastructure on Corstorphine Hill – parks, benches and bins, new planting and help with walls and watercourses.

Potential for new species introduction such as the locally extinct Aspen tree.

Potential creation of a 'window on local conservation' from Edinburgh Zoo.

3. WHAT WILL THE EXCHANGED LAND BE USED FOR?

The area would permit RZSS to create better access to the site so that for service vehicles would have a dedicated access network. Currently they have to negotiate visitors within the park. The land adopted by the Zoo will remain largely green, with only a roadway and potentially part of a building/buildings being on or on the edge of the site. All of the mature trees would be retained.

4. WHO USES THE LAND AT CORSTORPHINE HILL?

The area is used mainly by recreational users and in particular dog walkers. Towards the top of the hill, bordered by Murrayfield Golf Course is a passing point called Rest and Be Thankful. The proposals will expand this 'pinch point' and expand the total area of the nature reserve. On the northern slopes, there is an established network of formal pathways, with little requirement for change. To the south, the pathways are mostly informal and could be improved as part of the proposed partnership with Edinburgh Zoo.

5. IS THERE ANYTHING SIGNIFICANT IN TERMS OF WILDLIFE ON THE SITE AND IN THE LAND NOMINATED IN THE LAND EXCHANGE?

An independent environmental assessment will be carried out by the Council on their land. As far as we are aware there is nothing of local or national significance on the Council owned land. On the land currently owned by Edinburgh Zoo there is a badger sett that would be left undisturbed but under the proposals this would be bought into public ownership [under the Council].

6. WHAT HAPPENS IF THE LAND EXCHANGE DOES NOT TAKE PLACE?

RZSS will still need to address infrastructure improvements but these would be limited to existing land and forced to be undertaken within the current Zoo structure. We would need to reappraise what we want to do, and also consider the size and extent of the Zoo operations in Edinburgh.

DEVELOPMENT OF SURPLUS LAND ON THE WEST SIDE OF EDINBURGH ZOO

7. HOW MANY HOUSES WILL BE BUILT?

The number, size and position of housing has not been decided yet and is unlikely to be until we enter into discussions with a developer. Reports of 80 houses are unfounded as no decisions have been made. The Council will also be involved as part of the planning process. RZSS will take advice on what permits the greatest return to the Society and as a neighbour, it is in our interest to retain input into future designs. We intend to work closely with the land developers to ensure plans are in keeping and respectful and do not detract from the surroundings.

Our current thinking is for high quality, low density housing towards the top end and at the bottom of the site, and possibly a care home but these thoughts are very fluid.

8. WHERE WOULD THE ACCESS ROAD BE FOR THE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT?

Two options have been mentioned but no decision has been made – Kaimes Road and St John's Road. We've received conflicting views on the community's preference for this. We have no fixed view on this and as part of the planning process we would take the views of the local community on board.

9. WILL ACCESS FROM BALGREEN BE AFFECTED?

No, the informal path would remain as it is and access would be unchanged.

10. WHAT HAPPENS IF A DEVELOPER FOR THE LAND ON THE WEST SIDE IS NOT APPOINTED?

Without the resources released from the sale of land on the west side, RZSS would have to scale down infrastructure improvement plans unless an alternative source of income could be found.

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland is a registered charity and we rely on our visitors and supporters to fund our charitable work if you would like to donate to the Society please visit www.edinburghzoo.org.uk/support/