



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Mairi Gougeon MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands
Scottish Government

CC: Shona Robison MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government
Scottish Government

25 June 2025

Dear Mairi

Long term funding for Edinburgh Biomes Programme at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Members of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee visited the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) on Monday 16 June, where we met the Regius Keeper and Board Chair and a number of staff members. We welcomed hearing about the valuable work the RBGE does nationally and internationally to address the biodiversity and climate crises, and about how they promote an appreciation, understanding and love of plants and nature across various communities and sectors.

I understand that the RBGE sit within your remit, but I am also copying this letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, as its contents relate to budget matters.

During the visit, we heard about the financial challenges the RBGE faces in delivering the Edinburgh Biomes Programme. We understand the overall need for a programme of this type, in order to secure the RBGE's ageing infrastructure and the work that goes on inside it.

RBGE told us that the pandemic, the increase in the cost of materials due to the war in Ukraine and a period of high inflation, and unforeseen challenges with restoring Victorian and Georgian-era buildings had all led to increases in the cost of delivering the programme.

However, they also highlighted the issue of 'annuality' - single-year capital funding allocations for the programme - as a major reason for price rises and difficulties, preventing the RBGE from applying strategic, long-term thinking to the management of the programme. RBGE told us that had made procurement more inefficient,

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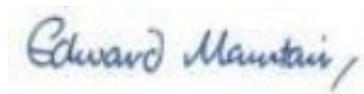
contributed to uncertainty around delivery and overall increased the total delivery cost significantly. The RBGE's estimate was that this had increased the total cost of the programme, and to the taxpayer, *so far* by an amount in the tens of millions. We note the importance of addressing this, given the work still to be done on the programme, including on the future energy centre.

The Committee agreed to write to ask you to outline:

1. How the Scottish Government is funding the Edinburgh Biomes Programme and whether it is satisfied that this funding approach delivers best value for the taxpayer?
2. The Scottish Government's own assessment of how an approach of 'annuality' has impacted on the overall cost of the Programme, what impact it expects it to have on costs to complete delivery of the Programme, and what options the Scottish Government has to avoid or mitigate the effects of single-year allocations to this programme.
3. The Scottish Government's current position and commitment on future capital allocations to RBGE for the completion of the Biomes Programme, noting in particular the relationship between the future delivery of the energy centre as part of the Biomes project and the low carbon objectives of this capital funding.
4. The current total projected cost for the Biomes Programme compared to the original projection.

I would be grateful for a response by 29 July.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward Mountain".

Edward Mountain MSP
Convener
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee