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Edward Mountain MSP
Convener
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Your ref: Edinburgh Biomes Programme
Our ref: 202500473290

30 July 2025

Dear Edward,

Thank you for your letter of 25 June on behalf of the NZET Committee following your recent visit to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh (RBGE) to hear about the Edinburgh Biomes Programme.

I am grateful to you and members of the Committee for taking the time to meet with colleagues from RBGE to hear about the progress and challenges associated with this critical infrastructure work. Typically, a programme of the scale and complexity of the Edinburgh Biomes will present unforeseen challenges during the period of works. However, I'm sure the Committee will agree that no one could have foreseen the scale of global events RBGE has had to navigate during the programme - including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine - which significantly disrupted supply chains and onsite operations. Notwithstanding these, work to date, including on the sensitive restoration of the Victorian Palm House has progressed as quickly as possible and with the full support of the Scottish Government.

As you are aware, the Scottish Government committed £58 million to the Edinburgh Biomes Programme which will see a fully restored Victorian Palm House and new Energy Centre. This major capital infrastructure investment is aimed at securing the long-term future of the National Living Plant collection and delivering significant reductions in carbon emission. This funding was confirmed in 2020 and provided RBGE with long term certainty over the budget for the programme for the years 2021/22 to 2025/26.

While I am fully aware of the pressures associated with aspects of the annual Budget Bill process, I do not recognise the suggestion that the budget process has increased the cost of the programme by the "tens of millions." I understand this term primarily relates to the impacts of external factors, referenced in your letter

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The annual consideration of spending plans by the Scottish Government is an established feature of the Budget Bill process, with all spending decisions subject to the approval of Scottish Parliament on a yearly basis. We have however, provided RBGE with flexibility in this annularity of spend, and agreed to the reprofiling of spend across financial years to reflect changes in the timing of the programme.

Overall, I am satisfied that RBGE has in place robust governance and oversight arrangements for the Programme, including ensuring best value for spend decisions, against what has been a very challenging fiscal backdrop and considerable inflationary pressures in the construction sector post Covid.

The Scottish Government will continue to play an important role in supporting RBGE as it moves forward with completion of works, including the energy centre as a critical part of the overall programme. My officials continue to work closely with RBGE on their future infrastructure plans and their revised plans for the scope and cost of the final programme. This work is informing a refreshed business case by RBGE, which shall inform budget allocations for the next capital spending review period (2026/27 – 2029/30).

Yours sincerely,



MAIRI GOUGEON