



April 2017



Citizens give massive thumbs down to Royal High School hotel.

Over 3000 objections have been lodged to the controversial planning application to build a hotel around the site of the old Royal High School on the south side of Calton Hill. In addition there were over 1000 objections to the application for consent to alter or even demolish the Listed Buildings. In contrast, less than 300 expressions of support were received for the proposed hotel.

The application lodged late last year modified, but did not withdraw, the previous hotel application that was refused

in 2015. The new proposal reduces the number of bedrooms and lowers some of the proposed new buildings, but the Cockburn Association and many others felt that the plans had not been changed fundamentally. The Cockburn has submitted a lengthy objection to the new application for planning permission and to the application for Listed Building consent. In it we point out that the proposed development would harm the qualities which justified the inscription of the Old and New Towns as a World Heritage Site. The proposed hotel buildings would dominate and loom over Thomas Hamilton's Greek-Revival A-listed building and undermine the composition. We highlight the importance of the setting in the greenspace of Calton Hill, and argue

that the development would damage the character of the Conservation Area and of the World Heritage Site. If you want to see our objection in full, please email Joe (admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk).

Economic benefits?

The developers argue that a luxury hotel will bring considerable economic benefits to the city and to Scotland. However, it is important to recognise that the claimed benefits are predictions not promises, and as we know economic predictions can sometimes prove to be wrong. Furthermore, the analysis by the economic consultants hired by the developers only looks at gross impacts, not net impacts. What this means, for example, is that if somebody was going to visit Edinburgh anyway and to stay in one of the existing hotels in the city, all the economic benefit of their visit is credited to the Calton Hill hotel, with no deduction for what they would have spent anyway had they stayed at another hotel.

Much of the economic case rests on the idea that the new hotel will attract very high spenders who would not otherwise come to Edinburgh. This may or may not prove to be the case. The economic consultants' report says "The direct employment impacts of the hotel during its construction and operation are small relative to local employment." In other words, if the economic case rested solely on how many jobs there would be during construction and then when the hotel is in business, then the negative impacts on the historic buildings and their setting could not be justified. There are over 323,000

jobs in Edinburgh, so the prediction that another 235 people could be employed in the hotel after 2021 is not a game changer in an economy that already has high levels of employment.

What now?

The developers had asked the Scottish Government to call in their new application and consider it along with their previous one and the approved application for use of the site by the Music School. The government has declined to do this. Thus the next stage in the story will be consideration of the 2017 application, and the objections to it, by Edinburgh's council. This could happen in June, though we cannot know for sure at this stage. The composition of the council will have changed from that which considered the previous hotel proposal and the one for the Music School, since we elect a new set of councillors in May. So it is impossible to guess how the Council might respond to the latest application.

If they decided to grant planning permission, and listed building consent, that would make it very difficult to stop development, short of taking the decision-making process to judicial review. Because of the leasing arrangement agreed between the council and the developers, the permission granted for the Music School would be rendered meaningless, and incapable of being implemented. On the other hand, if permission is refused – or granted with conditions that the developers did not like – then it seems likely that the developers would appeal, and an inquiry would eventually follow.

What if?

If a planning permission is given, and development is started, there can be no going back. Once listed buildings are demolished, they stay demolished. If large, unsympathetic wings are added to the Royal High School building its exceptional landscape setting will never be recaptured. Yet, if planning permission is granted, there are many economic circumstances that could affect what finally crowds out the beauty of the “Greek temple”.

Luxury hotels are seen as high risk ventures. A consultants’ report submitted as part of the developers’ case notes that in respect of luxury hotels “every new building and property conversion is a prototype product and operational issues may only become apparent on occupation and sustained use.”

There could be an overrun in construction costs: some believe that the figures being used by the developers are over-optimistic. Edinburgh’s citizens are only too aware that bullish estimates of construction costs can be confounded, as happened with the parliament building and on the trams project. What happens then? Also the calculations assume a much higher room rate than competitors. What if such rates meet market resistance? Might more rooms be needed to make the scheme viable? After all the original application in 2015 argued that more rooms than now planned were essential to viability.

In some circumstances we might even finish up with a budget hotel or an application to alter the designs to

accommodate extra rooms or alter the access. Once a hotel had been given permission and development started, and with the site leased to the developers, it would be difficult for citizens to stop such amendments.

Botanic Cottage wins Scottish Civic Trust award



Warm congratulations are due to Simpson and Brown Architects on their success in winning this year’s Scottish Civic Trust My Place award. Their Botanic Cottage in the Royal Botanical Gardens (RBGE) was nominated by the Cockburn Association for the award.

The origin of the “Botanic” lies back in 1763, when, like so much else in Edinburgh, it was one of the building blocks of the Scottish Enlightenment. However, in those days the garden was on Leith Walk. A two-storey cottage for the Head Gardener was commissioned, and designed by the eminent Georgian architects John Adam and James Craig. It stood for over two centuries on Leith Walk. Eventually it was abandoned and fell prey to vandals. Then in 1998, planning

permission was granted for development of an office block on the site.

That might have been the end of the story. As is so often the case, it was the actions of passionate enthusiasts who saved the day. The Botanic Cottage Trust was established to secure a future for this small, but architecturally and historically important building. Funding was initially secured to carefully record and dismantle the building and its stones and timber were carefully numbered and stored in the RBGE Nursery.

In 2012 ownership of the Botanic Cottage was transferred from the Trust to the RBGE and, inspired by initial research discoveries concerning the significance of the building and the surprising amount of original fabric that remained, an ambitious scheme to conserve the building emerged. In 2013, with financial support from The Heritage Lottery Fund and other funders, permission was granted to re-erect the Cottage on a new site, within the RBGE, to provide a new education and community hub within the Garden.

The Cottage design was enhanced by Simpson & Brown with the addition of two wings providing a classroom and potting shed. Maxi Construction were awarded the contract to rebuild the Cottage and work began on site in late 2014. Traditional construction materials, methods and skills were used throughout the build with the addition of renewable technologies incorporated into the design where possible.

The build was completed at the end of 2015 with the first users welcomed in early

2016. Since then a diverse range of groups have utilised the building, including Cockburn Association members who visited the building late last year.

Recruitment of a new Director

The departure of Marion Williams to take up a new job in fundraising in Newcastle means that the Cockburn is now seeking a new Director. We are working on the job description at the moment and hope to advertise, primarily on social media, late April or early May, with a closing date in late May and interviews in mid-June.

New Trustees

Following our appeal in the January Newsletter for new Trustees, the Cockburn Council has co-opted three new Trustees, all of whom will serve until the AGM in September.

Carmela Carnicella brings expertise in human resource management to the Council, filling one of the skills gaps that we had identified. She is already busy helping us in the recruitment process for our new Director. With a languages degree from Milan she is fluent in Italian and German as well as English. She has worked at a senior level in both Italy and Germany and now loves living in Edinburgh.

Stephen Hajducki is a Chartered Architect and Town Planner, with many years' experience in practice in both the private and public sectors. He has also been

involved with his local community council, and is the chairman of the Sir Patrick Geddes Memorial Trust.

John McKinney is passionate about traditional building and anybody in that field is likely to have come across his organising and advocacy work for the Scottish Traditional Building Forum. He is Secretary of the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group on Construction.

Chair's Notes



The Cockburn team has been very busy these last few weeks. The deadline for objections to the hotel development at the old Royal High School was 24 March. I was one of the platform speakers at the big public meeting on 14 March, which was organised by the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland. We got coverage on the news on STV Edinburgh, and in The Times.

Meanwhile Joe and James were busy in the office helping people through the process of submitting a valid objection. Now, while we wait for the hotel application to come before the city council, we are busy with

organising **Doors Open Day 2017**, which will be the weekend of 23-24 September – one for the diary! Joseph Taylor is leading on this, so if you have ideas for buildings you'd like to see included – or know potential sponsors or advertisers, please get in touch with him at our office.

We also have produced our Civic Agenda which is covered elsewhere in this Newsletter. We have sent details to all those standing in the local elections here in Edinburgh, and we have asked whether they support it. Our Civic Agenda seeks to conserve and therefore capitalise on what makes Edinburgh special. We will continue to focus on the positive ideas which it advocates.

The old Royal High School, Doors Open Day and the Civic Agenda are all high profile events. But such activities rely on a lot of "behind the scenes" activity. The Management and Finance Committee have benefitted greatly from Robin Mair's work on our finances. Robin has taken on the role of Acting Treasurer, and has been able to shed light on our current budget.

Another Trustee, Duncan Campbell has led the work of the Strategic Planning and Environment Committee. The review of the Scottish Planning system has made great demands on his time, and we owe him and his team thanks for ensuring that the Cockburn's view has been presented to the government.

Finally, I would like to thank Marion Williams for her work as Director. Marion has now gone to work in Newcastle, and so in the meantime our paid staff has been reduced to Joseph Taylor and James Garry.

It is a credit to them that since Marion left at the start of March they 'have kept the show on the road'.

Appointing a top quality Director is now our focus. We plan to advertise the post soon and hope to be able to interview short-listed candidates in mid-June.

Are you on email? Do we have your email address?

If you have an email address, please share it with us. It makes it easier and cheaper for us to communicate with you. We promise not to pass your email details on to any third party. If you prefer to receive the Newsletter by post that is fine, but email makes it easier for us to stay in touch.

Please contact
admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk
Thanks!

Cockburn's Civic Agenda wants a thriving city

Edinburgh is successful city, but not all successful cities are thriving cities, warns our Civic Agenda. Key messages to new councillors in the city are:

- Edinburgh's biggest assets are its landscape, townscape and architecture, which blend with its history to give the city unique qualities. Unless we conserve these, Edinburgh will cease to be special.
- Be bold - use the planning system to conserve our greenspaces and townscape, and to demand quality in architecture, design and environmental standards.

- Be caring – work with communities, not against them; identify and equip potential hubs for new commercial developments in less pressured areas and be firm in steering development to them.
- Be collaborative - convene a summit meeting with housing providers. Follow-up with mediation, involving them and community groups to broker a charter that would promote ambitious environmental and social targets in new developments.
- Be far-sighted – act now to avoid deterioration in the older housing stock. Work with the building industry to create a care and maintenance system that delivers efficiency, skills and jobs
- Be passionate for innovation and creativity - Stimulate innovation linked to Edinburgh's special strengths in tourism, financial services, education, and urban conservation.
- Be attentive and listening – work with communities and be responsive to their concerns about their local environments. Devolve budgets for street cleaning and area maintenance to community-level organisations or social enterprises.
- Be open – integrate and share information, and help local organisations to network and tap local understanding of their place, its needs and potential.
- Be internationalist – Put the UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 – “Make cities safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable” at the heart of the planning and delivery of development.

Events Update



Our free tour of St Cecilia's Hall is nearly sold out but there are a few tickets left for Cockburn members! If you are interested the details are as follows: an early opportunity to see the redevelopment work that has been taking place.

18th May 12 noon – 1.30 pm, meeting in the lobby

There will be a tour and a talk about the history of the building and its renovation by Head of Museums, Jacky MacBeath.

This event is for Cockburn members only and places are limited so please register with Joe who will confirm your booking.

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