

EDINBURGH URBAN DESIGN PANEL

The Old Royal High School

REPORT
of meeting held at
the City Chambers
on 28 October 2015

Presenters

William Gray Muir	RHSPT	John Sanders	Simpson & Brown
Richard Murphy	RMA	Pol MacDonald	Open
James Mason	RMA	Ken Taylor	St Mary's Music School
Mark Donaghy	RMA	Pam Young	St Mary's Music School
Lisa Proudfoot	Montagu Evans	David Givan	City of Edinburgh Council
Andrew Munnis	Montagu Evans	Susan Horner	City of Edinburgh Council

Panel members

David Leslie	Chair – City of Edinburgh Council	Charles Strang	EAA
Marion Williams	The Cockburn Association	Donald Canavan	EAA
Hugh Crawford	RTPI in Scotland	Gloria Lo	EAA
James Turner	Historic Environment Scotland	Dr Ola Uduku	ESALA
Bob Bainsfair	Landscape Institute Scotland	Steve McGill	Police Scotland
Adam Wilkinson	Edinburgh World Heritage Trust	Francis Newton	Secretariat – City of Edinburgh Council

Apologies

Andrew MacIver	Napier University	James Morgan	Heriot Watt University
Architecture + Design Scotland			

Observer

Jenny Bruce	City of Edinburgh Council
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Executive Summary

The proposal for review is the restoration and adaptation of the former Royal High School site at Regent Road, Edinburgh.

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to review the proposal at this early stage of the design process.

The Panel unanimously supported the general design strategy and approach, particularly that relating to the proposed use and adaptation of the original Hamilton building.

It is noted that the designs are at an early stage of development, and recommendations are made in developing detailed proposals in relation to the new build elements to the rear and eastern parts of the site, the landscape setting of the proposed development in relation to Calton Hill, the integration of parking and design of public realm enhancements to Regent Road.

Main Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The application site is the former Royal High School with its grounds and ancillary buildings. The site occupies a prominent, elevated position on the north side of Regent Road on Calton Hill.
- 1.2 The primary building is category 'A' listed, and was designed by Thomas Hamilton, in 1825-1829. It is composed of a symmetrical of 'the principal Doric temple-pavilion, with flanking colonnades and subsidiary temples'. The listed building group, all category 'A' also includes a gate lodge on the north west side of the site (built in 1885) and a classical style, and a classroom block (built 1894) to the north east of the main building. The northern boundary of the former school grounds is bounded by a deep retaining wall which is also listed. This wall runs alongside the public walkway on Calton Hill, part of which is included in the site area. An area of informal landscaping, including small trees and shrubs, is located at the western end of the site next to the entrance to the old school and the walkway to Calton Hill.

- 1.3 The site is located in the New Town Conservation Area on the edge of the Old Town Conservation Area and within the Edinburgh World Heritage Site.
- 1.4 The site and its surroundings are affected by a number of other designations. Calton Hill is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and is included in the Historic Scotland Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes. It contains a collection of monuments, including the category A listed, National Monument, Observatory and the Stewart monument designed by William Playfair and the Robert Burns monument, designed by Thomas Hamilton. The category A listed Royal Terrace is situated immediately to the east of the site and the category A listed, St Andrews House is located to the south east, on the opposite site of Regent Road.
- 1.5 The site is located in the Central Area in both the Edinburgh City Local Plan (ECLP) and Second Proposed Edinburgh Local Development Plan (LDP).
- 1.6 This proposal envisages the restoration and adaptation of the site to provide a new home for the St Mary's Music School. This would allow for expansion of the school to 120 students and also include residential boarding facilities.
- 1.7 The original Hamilton building would be converted into a series of three music performance spaces contained within the principal rooms, these being served by a new foyer and staircases at the lower level of the building. School accommodation, including classroom, dining room and offices would be placed within the eastern and western wings of the building. The performance spaces, which would include a concert hall, would be accessible to the public and serve as a new cultural venue.
- 1.8 The proposal envisages that the existing classroom to the west of the original Hamilton building, and Gymnasium and Lunch blocks lying to the east would be demolished. These buildings are covered by the category A listing and must be subject SHEP test to justify their demolition.
- 1.9 A largely single storey linear block with octagonal pavilion elements would be placed to the rear of the primary building. This would contain a series of small rooms for individual teaching and connect with an academic wing located to the eastern part of the site. This would be arranged around two courtyards, with an under level containing residential accommodation for the school. The area to the west of the original Hamilton building would remain an open landscaped space allowing for views to Calton Hill.
- 1.10 This is the first time that the proposals have been reviewed.
- 1.11 Declarations of interest were made by three panellists. Bob Bainsfair stated that his employer Ramboll Environ was involved in preparing ES/EIS data for the proposal although he had no personal involvement with the project and undertook to have no future role in respect of this submission. Dr Ola Udoku stated her child was a pupil at St Mary's School of Music and she was also a member of the School's Parent Teacher Association. Adam Wilkinson stated that William Gray Muir of the Royal High School Preservation Trust also sits on the board of Edinburgh World Heritage Trust. The nature of each declaration was discussed by the Panel and it was agreed that none were considered to represent a conflict of interest.
- 1.12 This report should be read in conjunction with the pre meeting papers which include an overview of the proposals, contextual and site analysis and preliminary design proposals.
- 1.13 This report is the view of the Panel and is not attributable to any one individual. The report does not prejudice any of the organisations who are represented at the Panel forming a differing view about the proposals at a later stage.

The Panel's View

2. Proposed Uses

- 2.1 The Panel recognise that the former Royal High School represents one of the key buildings of the Scottish enlightenment and its international significance.
- 2.2 The project team outlined the aims of the project would be two fold. In addition to offering a new home for the St Mary's Music School, the building would also offer a performance venue which would be open to the public. This cultural function would generate revenue to support the upkeep of the building outside term time.
- 2.3 The Panel welcomed the proposal in that it would allow the building to be returned to productive, inspiring use, and to an educational purpose for which it was originally designed. The cultural performance venue would also offer a public face for the school. The Panel felt that the proposed uses would offer a sustainable long term future of the site and achieve a sensitive adaptation for an historic building of international significance.
- 2.4 The Panel noted the challenges of combining the proposed public use with an educational use, particularly for reasons of child protection. The Panel supported the proposed entrance strategy which will require separate entrances for the school and public performance venue. The internal spaces of the building will also need to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate such uses. However the design of the school accommodation to the eastern part of the site would also allow for enclosed, secure play areas to be created.
- 2.5 The Panel commented that the site would offer a highly accessible location for the proposed uses, being close to major transport facilities and strategically placed in relation to other cultural facilities in the city. The nature of the proposal would return the building to active use thus help improve public safety in the Regent Road area.
- 2.6 However, the Panel questioned whether any future expansion of the school needs would be possible, given the size and constraints of the site. The Panel also considered whether proposed accommodation to the eastern part of the site would offer a sufficient level of external space for the children to use. These are issues which the project team may wish to consider further in the development of their proposals.

3. Concept and impact upon historic assets including the Hamilton Building and Calton Hill

- 3.1 The project team outlined their proposed entrance strategy for the Hamilton building. The proposed concert hall and performance spaces would be accessed via the existing southern steps at the base of the building on Regent Road, this in turn leading to a new foyer area and internal staircases. The external, side staircases leading to the terraces above would be retained in their original form. This arrangement would also allow separate circulation to be maintained for the operation of the school and as a public performance venue.
- 3.2 The Panel considered that the proposed entrance arrangements would acknowledge the ritualistic journey through the building and allow the original front entrance and staircases to be maintained as pieces of architectural sculpture.
- 3.3 The Panel noted that new glazed openings beneath the existing portico would allow natural light to enter the foyer space below. The height of the new opening would be carefully controlled to ensure minimal visual impact on the existing façade when viewed from the road. The Panel accepted that the proposed foyer would be critical to the long term re-use of the building and although parts of the existing terrace area would be removed this area is currently redundant and unused. The original Hamilton design envisaged a range of terraces and levels of the site will be maintained as existing. The Panel suggested that further dialogue needs to take place on the detail of new openings to the building.
- 3.4 Overall, the Panel were strongly supportive of the subtle level of intervention which would be required to the front elevation of the original Hamilton building. The composition and horizontality of the building would be retained and the proposed entrance strategy could offer an exciting experience to users of the building. However, notwithstanding the importance of

the principal front elevation, the Panel also recognised the need to consider the building in the round. It was remarked that the rear elevation is also well detailed and important and this requires careful consideration as part of the overall design development.

- 3.5 The Panel noted that the existing classroom to the west of the original Hamilton building, Gymnasium and Lunch blocks lying to the east are proposed for demolition. The Panel felt that the loss of the listed buildings could be justifiable in that it would return the building to its original composition and greatly improve its landscape setting. The Panel felt that the proposed nature of development to the rear of the Hamilton building would be acceptable and would not compromise its setting.
- 3.6 The Panel felt that the design approach would respect the setting of Calton Hill, but remarked that the effect of lighting and potential light leakage need to be further considered. Particular impacts may arise with the proposed roof lights and these should be explored further.
- 3.7 The Panel enquired how DDA requirements might be achieved given the particular constraints of the historic building. The design team outlined that the DDA compliant access can be achieved from the front of the building via a passageway beneath the stairs with a lift then leading to the main performance level.
- 3.8 In summary, the Panel felt these represented exciting and innovative proposals offering an intuitive re-use of the building. The design was being progressed well and the overall concept would relate well to the site. The impact of the proposals on the setting of the Hamilton Building, Calton Hill and key views across the city would be negligible. Previous concerns relating to the development including the potential loss of the playground, railings and the breakthrough into the building from Regent Road have been alleviated.

4. Design of new build elements and landscape

- 4.1 The Panel were generally supportive of the design approach for the new buildings and landscaped spaces on the site, although recognised that their detailed design still requires further development.
- 4.2 The Panel remarked that the octagonal form of the pavilion elements make reference to the atria on the original Hamilton building and would encourage both this idea and other design architectural typologies to be further explored.
- 4.3 The Panel welcomed the proposed use of green roofs to the new buildings and it was recognised these could assist in reconciling the setting of the new buildings with Calton Hill.
- 4.4 The proposals must also consider the setting of the Hamilton belvedere to the north east of the site and seek to integrate this feature into the overall design.

5. Public Realm and Transport

- 5.1 The Panel commented the current environment of Regent Road does not serve the building well and the area to the front of the building needs to be re-energised. The public realm to the front of the building needs to be addressed as part of the project, particularly the treatment of the road which would benefit from traffic calming. In response to this, the project team stated that the creation of a more open environment would be integral part of returning the building to public use. The Trust views itself as being a quasi public body and would wish to team up with the Council in terms of managing the public realm.
- 5.2 The Panel also noted that the project would seek to re-animate the front of the building with a series of terraces, as envisaged in original architectural concept.
- 5.3 The Panel enquired as to how car parking would be accommodated within the proposals. The project team were anxious that this should be discouraged and a reduced parking provision would be feasible given the accessibility of the site. The Panel stated that any parking requirements, including those for buses and service vehicles must be carefully integrated with the design of public realm and should not dominate the exterior of the building.

6.1 Recommendations

In developing the design, the Panel supports the following aspects and therefore advocates that these should remain in the proposals:

- The proposed concept for the scheme based around the Music School and a public performance venue
- The ingenuity and sensitive approach being adopted for the Hamilton building including the design strategy for the main entrance and the minimal level of intervention required to the principal façade
- The proposed use of green roofs to the new buildings to allow for their effective reconciliation with the setting of the Hamilton building and Calton Hill
- The proposed arrangements for disabled access to the original Hamilton building

In developing the proposals the Panel suggests the following matters should be addressed:

- The design and architectural language of the new build elements to the rear and eastern parts of the site
- The detailed landscape design proposals for the site including the terraces and courtyard areas for the school accommodation
- The effect of lighting and light leakage both to the existing and proposed buildings needs to be further considered, particularly in relation to the landscape setting of Calton Hill
- The design of public realm enhancements to Regent Road. These should be developed in close collaboration with the Council
- Seek to minimise the parking levels across the site with any essential parking requirements carefully integrated into the design
- The configuration and role of the proposed external courtyards in ensuring a sufficient level of external space for the children to use
- The proposals must also consider the setting of the Hamilton belvedere to the north east of the site and seek to integrate this feature into the overall design
- A strategy for any future expansion of the Music School which considers the size and particular constraints of the site