



thecockburnassociation

Edinburgh's Civic Trust

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Dear Euan & Carla

Re: 15/05662/FUL & 15/05665/LBC

15/05662/FUL | Project proposes the conservation of Thomas Hamilton designed former Royal High School building to form new premises for St Mary's Music School. Combined with demolition of later ancillary buildings, space to the East is created for new residential, teaching + practice facility. Proposed new landscaped public garden to West. A new basement is created under Main Hall to provide new foyer giving access to public performance spaces above. |New Parliament House 5 - 7 Regent Road Edinburgh EH7 5BL

The Cockburn Association has given careful consideration to these applications and supports the proposals.

Hamilton's High School is carefully conceived in relation to Calton Hill and the other monuments around the hill. The elevation of the High School itself is symmetrical, the overall composition of buildings and monuments around Calton Hill is asymmetrical. This group forms Edinburgh's Acropolis: The Athens of the North. It is thus an important part of Edinburgh's World Heritage designation.

The location of the High School was deliberately placed between the New Town and Old Town to serve the whole town; yet set in arcadia, is not immediately of either. The dynamic composition of Calton Hill and the High School as a standalone temple forms a green break between the terraces of Waterloo Place and those of Regent Terrace. The proposals show an understanding and respect for the setting.

The proposals do nothing to destroy the integrity of the High School building which is acknowledged to be of international importance, being one of the most noted examples of European neo-classical architecture. As a 'temple to learning', limited fenestration to Regent Road contributes to the purity of the building. The sculptural quality of this elevation makes adaptation to a music school and performance space ideal, without undermining and compromising its important features. The reconfigured entrance from Regent Road is well contrived, the contemporary new foyer enables circulation of the interior space and the assembly hall is restored as an auditorium. The demolition of the gymnasium building is acceptable, allowing a low level, horizontal design to replace it and revealing Hamilton's belvedere and retaining wall.

The music school would be an asset to Edinburgh, within a landmark building in the tradition of schools with philanthropic support. The cultural, economic and social value would be welcome and it provides an appropriate use for this civic asset. As an exemplary work of art, the design and purpose of the High School should be seen in its cultural context. After the Reformation, the intention was to make knowledge accessible across Scotland, through establishing schools in every parish. From an enlightened nineteenth century perspective the meritocratic intent of this institution, embodied as a work of art, sows early seeds for an egalitarian society. Edinburgh's High School building, as a temple to learning, is the architectural pinnacle of this enlightened policy. Rather than physical changes to its elevations, 'accessibility' for this landmark civic asset is about the overriding purpose of the building.

The High School building is protected as an internationally important example of architecture. It is important that the building and the site are protected for current and future generations of Edinburgh's citizens and visitors.

These are our main reasons for supporting the proposals:

- we welcome the conservation-based approach. The delightful entrance lodge is retained. This is not by Hamilton, but a very skilful and accomplished design in its own right which works very well within the set-piece design. It features pediments and has a front-on-all-sides approach contributing to the position at the foot of the hill access road and ties into the railings like Hamilton's front pavilions on Regent Road
- the new build sits low in relation to the centre building. They do not disturb the whole idea of the dominant temple on a wild hill. Hamilton's building would remain dominant
- the composition sits comfortably on the site. We note Historic Scotland's view that the western terrace should remain undeveloped so as to afford a side view of Hamilton's building. New landscaping is proposed to enhance the setting and access
- Hamilton's building, as with any set piece of this type, was conceived perfectly and is a complete design that does not lend itself to extension. The brilliant design proposed brings the building back into full use without harming its integrity and the site retains its principal use as a school
- the proposals are fully funded ensuring the restoration work to the listed buildings and the development of the music school, a music school that cements the international reputation for music and festivals in the city and a venue with facilities that are perfect for the festival programmes.

Yours sincerely



Marion Williams
Director