

Acheson House to become home to Edinburgh World Heritage

✘ 140 Canongate is a building set back from the street behind an imposing door.

The A-listed house just up the road from Holyrood is to be renovated if plans for it to become home to Edinburgh World Heritage later this year are approved by councillors at their Finance and Resources Committee meeting on Tuesday 7 June 2011.

The plan is for EWH to move from their present HQ in Charlotte Square to the seventeenth century-built Acheson House in the Canongate. After our visit today we have to say that there is some work to be done! You can see that from the photographs below.

Built in 1633 for Sir Archibald Acheson, Secretary of State for King Charles 1, the building has been empty for nearly 20 years. It was last used by the Scottish Crafts Centre and has been on the Buildings at Risk register since 2000. There are huge gaps in the floor and evidence of some dampness.

The Council's long term vision for Acheson House, as agreed by the Council's Culture and Leisure Committee in February 2008, is to see it integrated with Huntly House, which lies adjacent and currently houses the Museum of Edinburgh, to form a Museums Hub. Details of this first stage of the project, covering the ground floor of Acheson House, will be reported to the Council's Culture and Leisure Committee later this month.

In the meantime, the upper floors of Acheson House are unoccupied and require significant investment to bring them into useable condition, with Historic Scotland granting the Council £120,000 towards this restoration and refurbishment

through EWH.

The Finance & Resources Committee are now being asked to approve a 'licence to occupy' for EWH covering the first floor and part of the ground floor of Acheson House. The five year licence, from 1 October 2011, would see EWH use the first floor as office space and share use of the ground floor meeting room.

Councillor Deidre Brock, Culture and Leisure Convener, said: "Acheson House is one of the Old Town's most historic buildings and our longterm vision is to bring it back to life as part of a Museums Hub devoted to charting the fascinating development of Scotland's Capital city. Allowing EWH to occupy Acheson House on a temporary basis will greatly assist us in the sympathetic conservation of this A-listed 17th century building, helping guarantee it a suitably prominent role in Edinburgh's 21st century cultural infrastructure."

Adam Wilkinson, Director of Edinburgh World Heritage, said: "We are excited about the prospect of a move up to the Acheson House. It is a great opportunity to help bring life back to this fascinating and beautiful building, reminding us of the historically diverse social mix of the Old Town. The New Town has been a generous host to EWH for the last 12 years and it has been a privilege to work in Charlotte Square, to which we will bid a very fond farewell."

Martin Fairley, Historic Scotland Head of Investments, said: "We wish EWH all the best with the proposed relocation and are happy to be able to support the repairs to its new home. It has achieved a great deal and supported many excellent projects from its base in the New Town and I hope that this move will bring its work to the attention of even more people."

For the past 12 years EWH has been based at No.5 Charlotte Square, which has a connection with Acheson House through the

4th Marquess of Bute. He was a conservation enthusiast who bought both properties in the early 20th century to restore them to their original condition.

Although the exterior of the building is in good condition – desperately needed roof repairs were carried out recently – Acheson House's interior requires some repairs, as well as fitting out with necessary services. We had to step carefully as the required work will include new floors, plasterwork to walls and ceilings, refurbishment of windows and updating of the electrical installations. The cost is expected to be around £120,000, funded by the grant from EWH.