

Former Royal High building to become high class hotel



A 19th century building used mainly as a school, but which was earmarked as the new parliament building for a devolved Scotland may be brought into use as a luxury hotel. The building has been empty since 1968 but is owned by the council and used for storage of ballot boxes.

Proposals to transform the old Royal High School on Edinburgh's Calton Hill into a world-class hotel were announced today by the project developers. The former boys' school, designed by Thomas Hamilton, opened in 1829 but has remained empty since 1968 when the Royal High School moved to Barnton.

Over the years, numerous uses have been suggested for what is one of Edinburgh's most distinctive landmarks, from a potential site for the new Scottish Parliament to a photography or military museum. The City of Edinburgh Council, which own the A listed building, granted Duddingston House Properties (DHP) a conditional ground lease for 125 years after the company won an open competition in 2010.

Designed by award-winning architect Gareth Hoskins, the new hotel when completed, will provide the capital with a distinctive hotel of international standing with Thomas Hamilton's restored building as its centrepiece. Three of the world's top hotel operators, none of whom currently have a presence in Scotland, have been shortlisted as front-runners to manage the new hotel.

The economic impact of this new type of hotel offering would be significant not just for Edinburgh but for the whole of Scotland. When operational the hotel is likely to create 640

local jobs and contribute on average £27 million annually to Edinburgh's GDP. On a Scotland-wide basis the hotel could support an additional 100 jobs, across different sectors including tourism, retail and leisure, and contribute an estimated £32m in GDP to Scotland's economy annually.*

A spokesperson from the City of Edinburgh Council's Economic Development Department said: "The Old Royal High school building has not had a continuous use since the school moved 46 years ago. We look forward to the pre-application process in January 2015 for this important *Edinburgh 12*** project by the developers who won the council's competition. Edinburgh is demonstrating its ability to attract significant inward investment across a series of important projects which are crucial to the positioning of the city in Europe and to the creation of new job opportunities."

✘ The plan to turn the old Royal High School into a hotel of international standing is a fully-funded proposal with in excess of £55m committed by a group of institutional investors led by DHP's Bruce Hare and David Orr of the Urbanist Group. Orr, a hotelier, who was instrumental in bringing Harvey Nichols to Edinburgh, believes that the proposal for the new hotel has the potential to do for tourism what the department store did for retailing in the city.

"What we are proposing to do is to add something truly special to the Edinburgh hotel market by bringing one of the best hotel operators in the world to the city. This will not in any way diminish current hotel provision; indeed it will add another tier at the top which can only benefit all of the city's operators. By increasing the breadth of hotel offering, Scotland's capital will be in a position to attract new visitors from the top end of the market as well as improve its ability to compete with other European cities for international diplomatic events and important global conferences. But importantly, one of Edinburgh's

architectural jewels in the crown will be sensitively restored and the public will have access to Hamilton's superb building for the first time."

Gordon Dewar, chief executive of Edinburgh Airport, has urged the city's business community to give the widest possible support to the project. "Edinburgh's success in world tourism requires that it keeps ahead of its competition and responds to the needs and demands of the tourist market. A world-class hotel will enable Edinburgh to market itself around the globe as a great place to live, work and study as well as attract further inward investment opportunities to the city. This will also help sell Edinburgh to the airlines at a time when we are competing with many other European Airports to attract their investment into the capital both as a market and a destination."

The developers are due to submit a Proposal of Application Notice (PAN) to the council in January 2015 followed by three days of public consultations at the old Royal High School in February 2015.