

Plans for the Royal High School on public view today



The development of the former Royal High School building on Regent Road has attracted much comment in Edinburgh and today is your final chance to go and see the public exhibition of the proposals to redevelop the 19th century building into a luxury hotel. The exhibition is open till 7pm this evening.

As part of the public consultation process, developers Duddingston House Properties and the Urbanist Group along with Gareth Hoskins Architects, have invited the public to discuss the proposals with the project team at the school. The exhibition there follows the first public consultation last month which attracted nearly 600 people. The developers tell us that 76% of the 383 people who completed the questionnaire then expressed strong support for the proposals.





The display includes the latest impressions of what the new hotel might look like by architect Gareth Hoskins. Hoskins, whose work in Edinburgh has won many awards, says he is keen to ensure the new architectural elements restore Hamilton's building as part of a more considered and planned setting for the three buildings on the site. "We've created a great deal of space around Hamilton's strong sculptural building so it becomes the central focus. The scale of the new symmetrical buildings either side of the centrepiece draws from Hamilton's architectural language in the use of the stone in a stylised contemporary colonnade. As the former school is the focal point of the amazing stage set of Calton Hill, we've take great care to make sure none of the new elements break the

skyline or conflict with the other monuments on this dramatic backdrop.”

Speaking on behalf of the project team, David Orr of the Urbanist Group, is looking forward to further discussions with members of the public about the latest designs which will continue to be refined as part of the planning process. “We’ve responded to what people commented on in the first public consultation and we are keen for people to continue to get in touch with their questions and comments even beyond this current exhibition. While we’ve had encouragement from some quarters, we also recognise there is anxiety from others so we will continue to gather information and to respond to what people are saying. We understand the stewardship and responsibility that goes with this proposal and want to do something brilliant for the city.”

The Edinburgh Reporter met with David Orr who explained his vision for the building, and also met a rather well-known former pupil who shared his thoughts on the building with us:

The old Royal High School will be open for the public consultation today Friday 6 March from 10am – 7pm prior to an application for planning consent being submitted to The City of Edinburgh Council in due course.

One former pupil explained to us that there used to be a swimming pool in the secondary school building and a science block at the far end, but the proposals include demolition of everything except the central original structure and replacement by bedroom wings. The developer hopes this will mean that the original part of the building will be open as ‘public space’ for the first time, since the centre will house bars, restaurants and space for art exhibitions there.

Another former pupil we spoke to expressed the view that any use of the building would be better than leaving it empty any longer. He said: “ It is tragic that it has lain empty all

this time.” The school which used extra classrooms at numbers 1,2 and 4 Regent Terrace moved out to Barnton in the late 1960s. The Royal High Junior School was at Jock’s Lodge at Northfield.

The Cockburn Association’s Marion Williams has expressed their views on the proposed development and said that they are disappointed that the entrance lodge would be demolished. Although this is a later addition and not by the original architect, the Association feel that it should be worked into any scheme. David Orr explained to us that by removing the additions and by taking all new building forward to the original building line the vista approaching from Waterloo Place would in his view be much improved and the walkway to the top of Calton Hill would become more ‘accessible’ simply by being less hidden away.

The Cockburn Association dispute the level of repairs which might be needed to the interior of the building and claim that the conservation work done in the 1970s when the building was to be used as the Scottish Parliament was thoroughly executed.

In relation to what might be built the Association feel the new pavilion blocks would be too high and would feature too much glass which would ‘disturb the whole idea of the dominant temple on a wild hill’. Their view is that the new proposals ‘prove that any viably-sized hotel does not work spatially and compositionally on this very special site’ and they question whether mothballing would not in fact be a safer option for the long-term security of the building.

They also claim that a hotel is not a public building as access depends on management policy, and they feel that use as an hotel is not appropriate for such an important building.

