

# Decision on St Mary's Music School planning application due on Wednesday



The former Royal High School has lain empty for decades, and now there are two planning applications lodged in respect of the same building.

The first is from the consortium of Duddingston House Properties and the Urbanist Group (with a promise from Rosewood Hotels that they will use the building as a luxury offering in their portfolio). That was rejected by the council last December and has since gone to appeal. This is the group which has a lease arrangement with the council who own the building all subject to planning permission being obtained. The plans showed a six storey hotel around the existing building with parts to each side being demolished.

The second application is being lodged by St Mary's Music School who wish to create a new home for their pupils, promising to throw open the doors for concerts and public events. Their application is financially backed by the Dunard Fund and proposes a 300 seat concert hall in the debating chamber, a new entrance on Regent Road and a publicly accessible garden on the west and north. New modern school buildings on the east and north would provide classrooms and accommodation for pupils.

The school says that this would provide the answer to a call for concert venues in the capital especially during the summer, and would allow the school to expand its community outreach programme to just under 2,000 local participants.

The school has 83 pupils at present and seeks to expand their roll to 120. The plans are recommended for approval by the planning officials when they come before the committee this week.

The planners say that the proposals to create and improved school campus support the principles of Scottish Planning Policy for sustainable development in terms of its contribution towards educational infrastructure. The school would have to enter into a S 75 agreement with the council to provide footpath improvements alongside the planning proposal.

William Gray Muir, the Chair of the Royal High School Preservation Trust, said: "The former Royal High School is pivotal to Edinburgh's World Heritage Status and our plans are designed to celebrate, conserve and enhance the site for the people of Edinburgh. By making it home to St Mary's Music School we also hope to reinforce musical education at the heart of the city's cultural heritage.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to transform a building at risk into a dynamic asset for students, residents, visitors to the city, educational and cultural organisations and the creative sector as a whole.

"Our plans are fully funded, they bring together world-class culture and heritage in a highly visible and meaningful way and have overwhelming support from local residents and heritage organisations concerned about preserving our UNESCO World Heritage Status. All of this can be achieved without any adverse change to the setting of the historic site."



Dr Kenneth Taylor (head teacher of St Mary's Music School) and William Gray Muir (Chairman of Royal High School Preservation Trust) outside the Royal High School

Pic Peter Devlin

Dr Kenneth Taylor, Headteacher at St Mary's Music School, added: "A move to the Royal High School under the Trust's plans would enable St Mary's Music School to have the performance space we have always aspired to. It will enable us to bring music lovers into the school and greatly expand our outreach activities.

"Everyone associated with the school and our supporters within the wider musical and cultural community are hugely excited that this move provides a wonderful and unique opportunity to raise our profile on the international stage, drawing attention to the world class standard of education at St Mary's Music School, with music at the heart of everything we do."

The architects involved in the project are Richard Murphy Architects and conservation architects Simpson & Brown.

With 553 comments on this application this planning matter which has attracted some controversy in respect of both proposals.

Since the first application is out to appeal it will be an interesting day on Wednesday to see what is possible and what the planners do.