

Council rejects Hotel plan for Royal High School

The council's planning committee decided today to turn down an application to convert the A-listed former Royal High School into a luxury hotel.

The previous application for a 147 room hotel complete with side 'wings' was refused in 2015, and today's marathon meeting accepted the council officers' recommendations to refuse this application.

Cllr Lewis Ritchie, Planning Convener for the CEC, said: "Both sides of the proposal were heard today and Councillors thoroughly examined the issues presented to them. However the Planning Committee decided that the application did not meet the high standard required for one of Edinburgh's most iconic buildings, and voted unanimously to refuse it.

"The developer now has the right to appeal this decision. The original planning application for a hotel, refused by the Council in December 2015, was appealed by the developer and is currently with Scottish Ministers. It would therefore not be appropriate to make any further comment at this time."



Speaking at the Planning Hearing Claire Miller Green councillor for City Centre said:

"I'm delighted that planning committee listened to the overwhelming evidence from our own officers, external experts and public opinion and rejected the proposal. Perhaps, if the developer's vision for the site had highlighted and showcased the wonderful architecture, preserved the heritage, and

brought benefits to the neighbourhood then residents might have been supportive.

“However I don’t think these proposals are for a boutique hotel any more. If you need to build extensions to create over 100 bedrooms, then the buildings on the site just aren’t suitable for the hotel you’re trying to create.

“One of Edinburgh’s landmark buildings deserves better.”

Permission already exists to allow the building to be used for a Music School although legal title is still required.

William Gray Muir, Chair of the Royal High School Preservation Trust said:

“We are very pleased to note the unanimous rejection of this application, embracing Scotland’s full political spectrum. It is difficult to disagree with the committee Convenor’s description of the proposal as “universally reviled”. Not one of the many civic representatives who spoke today had received a single comment in favour of this scheme.

“The applicants angrily attacked all of the parties who disagreed with them, and showed an alarming lack of respect for the process, the consultees and the people of Edinburgh. Well, the people of Edinburgh and their appointed representatives have given their unequivocal verdict. The Scottish Government will surely have taken note.

“Let’s hope the development consortium shows some sense of dignity and bow out quickly, letting the City pursue a much brighter future for this wonderful building. The Royal High School Preservation Trust looks forward to pursuing its exciting, positive vision for the building as soon as the way is clear.”

Dr Kenneth Taylor, Headteacher at St Mary’s Music School, said:

“The school has always been conscious that the Royal High School Preservation Trust’s proposal to move St Mary’s Music School to the former Royal High School building would succeed only if the local authority opted to reject planning approval for an alternative commercial proposal for the site.

“We are delighted that councillors have taken that decision today. RHSPT’s proposal, which has already been granted planning approval, provides a far closer match with the architectural and cultural significance of the unique site.

“St Mary’s Music School is not just a school for Edinburgh, but one for the whole of Scotland with our pupils coming from across the nation and beyond, and all taken on musical ability regardless of personal circumstances. We want to build on our music and academic success. The move to the former Royal High School provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to create a cultural hub which will bring great benefits not only for Edinburgh but for the benefit of aspiring young musicians throughout Scotland.

“Our sincere hope now is that a way can be found that allows the plans for a hotel development to be put to rest quickly so that the next chapter for the site as a seat of education and performance is not delayed. The weight of public opinion has fallen in favour of our plans in large part because everyone associated with the project has worked hard to demonstrate their excellence beyond doubt. There seems little advantage to anyone in repeating the same arguments through a protracted appeal process. Let us move on with making our vision a reality.”

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