

Royal High School – Music school ‘ready to begin work immediately’ following planning decision

The Royal High School has been empty for over half a century, and will remain so for a little while longer. Scottish Ministers have rejected permission to Duddingston House Properties and Urbanist Hotels who wanted to develop it into a luxury hotel. Rosewood the luxury hotel brand was standing ready to take the building over once redeveloped.

The developers presented two different applications between 2015 and 2017, making changes that they thought would allow the proposal to proceed, but it was not to be. The glass extensions to the sides appeared to be one step too far for the planning department at the council and also for Scottish Ministers to allow on appeal.

The Cockburn Association, the city’s civic trust, is rejoicing today on Twitter that a decision has now been made against the hotel scheme.

At present it is the hotel developers who hold a lease from the owners, The City of Edinburgh Council, until 2022. The council's planning department already approved an application for the music school – but they have no legal right to the building, although plenty of investment to carry out the plans. Their main backer is the Dunard Fund, which has deep pockets and was also behind the proposed new concert hall.

The Cockburn believes that the hotel developers must now step back from their legal agreement with the council and allow St Mary's Music School to step in and move forward with their plans approved in 2016.

William Gray Muir, Chairman of the Royal High School Preservation Trust, said: "Scottish Ministers should be congratulated on this considered and sensible decision. Their recognition of the importance of the building reinforces our belief that it is the perfect place for Scotland's national music school. Doing so will bring together two of Scotland's national treasures. We hope that the City Council will now be in a position discuss how we can jointly make this happen. With their agreement we would be able to start work immediately, with the necessary planning consents and funding already in place."

Dr Kenneth Taylor, Headteacher at St Mary's Music School, added: "Everyone at St Mary's Music School is heartened at the very welcome news that we are a significant step closer to securing the Old Royal High School as our new home. Thanks to the wholehearted support and generosity of Dunard Fund, the funding is in place and a future on the world stage for a cultural hub for music education and outreach in Scotland has now opened before us.

"We would congratulate Scottish Ministers for making this possible. We also thank everyone in the world of arts and education, as well as the general public in Edinburgh, who have backed us and wished us well with our plans over the last

two years and hope that they are as thrilled as we are.”

The decision was granted by The Scottish Government’s Planning and Architecture Division following a six week long public enquiry in 2018. This has indeed been a long-awaited decision on the redevelopment of the Thomas Hamilton building. The decision is now published on the government’s website [here](#).

BREAKING NEWS

Old Royal High School Hotel Scheme Refused!

We are delighted with the decision to dismiss the appeal and to refuse planning and listed building consent to this hotel proposal. (1/5) pic.twitter.com/IiCB3eIpYv

– Cockburn Association (The Edinburgh Civic Trust) (@thecockburn) [October 27, 2020](#)

Sarah Boyack, Lothians MSP, has commented. She said: “Today’s decision is very good news. I objected to this application because I believed it would have a negative impact on the city and in particular our World Heritage Site.

“I supported the proposal for the site to be developed by St Mary’s music school and hope that works may now proceed so that we see this fantastic site used to the benefit of the city and our music culture for the future.”

The Music School wants to move into the building which they will renovate and create a national music school for Scotland.

A spokesperson said earlier this year: “In 2015, the Royal High School Preservation Trust submitted plans to the City of Edinburgh Council to repurpose the old Royal High School on Calton Hill as a national music school for Scotland and the new home for St Mary’s Music School.

“This is not simply about educating our most talented young

people, but about giving every young person in Scotland (and beyond) access to the joy of music making through traditional and distance teaching, state-of-the-art digital facilities, community classes, masterclasses and performance – all delivered from one central hub of musical excellence.”



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