

Long hearing on New Town North plans to be held on Wednesday

The former RBS site at the foot of Dundas Street lies vacant awaiting redevelopment, but the planning process continues.

It is recommended for approval by planners at their meeting on Wednesday, but it has to be said that there is opposition from local residents.

There will be a hearing on the application for around 350 flats, an office block and hotel on the 2.4 hectare site with many parties involved and a timetable of contributions which will be delivered online has been set for three hours from 10.15 am until 1.15pm.

One of the consultees which will have five minutes to deliver their thoughts is the Fettes Row and Royal Crescent Association (FRRCA). They have in the last month or so stepped up their campaign against what they call the 'insensitive plans' for the site.

FRRCA explained that their main objection is the removal of mature trees on the site including those near the George V Park. They say that the developers calls for permission to fell the trees on Dundas Street and Fettes Row on the grounds that they are dangerous is simply not acceptable, and that the only reason that the developer wants to remove the trees is to build six metres closer to the treeline than the existing office. A spokesperson said: "King George V Park would face

six-storey flats very close to the Park's boundaries. The impact on this tranquil haven would be devastating. This is the only public park in the area and the proposed development would overshadow the park, without providing significant extra greenspace for future residents."



Former RBS Building, Dundas Street. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

New Town and Broughton Community Council (NTBCC) have had many conversations at their meetings on the topic of the proposed development. While they are largely supportive of a development of the brownfield site, they highlighted concerns over the height of the four crescent blocks which they feel will have a detrimental effect on the park and the wider World Heritage Site.

The community council are not under any illusions as to the existing buildings. They said: "There is an opportunity to create something which could be an asset to both the local community as well as the wider city. NTBCC are not against appropriate development for the site which directly abuts the Edinburgh World Heritage site and is within the New Town Conservation Area – including replacement of some of the buildings that arguably have little architectural merit."

The new buildings to be erected on what would be a cleared site will lie next to A listed buildings on Royal Crescent and Fettes Row. NTBCC also object to the loss of trees, and they would like the railings retained to delineate the old and the new five or six storey blocks. As to noise they would prefer that the demolition materials are dealt with off site – the planning application suggests installation of a concrete crusher on the existing car park.

The former RBS building is owned and set to be developed by Ediston and Orion Capital Managers who welcome the planning officers' recommendation for their plans to be approved. They

report that they have held four formal public consultation events and more than 50 meetings with local interested parties.

Ross McNulty, Development Director at Ediston said, “We warmly welcome these recommendations and the acknowledgement that these proposals meet the Council’s planning policies and guidelines and support high quality development on brownfield sites. This is the largest brownfield site to come forward in Edinburgh for many years, and we have worked hard to ensure that the proposals are consistent with all the relevant policies and objectives. We also welcome the fact that there have been no objections from statutory consultees including Historic Environment Scotland and Edinburgh World Heritage.

“Successive ‘lockdowns’ have had a considerable impact on Edinburgh’s City Centre and these proposals will be a major boost for the City at the very time one is needed. This will be the first major new development to begin after the Covid-19 crisis eases. The proposal for this important site provides the delivery of:

- 350 new homes, including the first new Affordable Housing in the New Town and some of the City’s best new housing
- 80,000 square feet of new prime office space that will help create modern City centre workspace for 700 people
- 2.42 acres of new usable space and 1.5 acres of new green space (created by delivering parking requirements underground to maximise pedestrian movement above ground)
- New low-carbon buildings that are in keeping with the surrounding area in terms of height and density
- Planting of new trees, and a guaranteed 25-year Tree Management Plan
- Additional tree planting, maintenance and investment in the neighbouring King George V Park

“We fully understand and appreciate that this is a special place and we have worked hard to ensure that we deliver a high-quality development that respects the heritage of the City’s New Town and our neighbours in the local community. Our ambition is to deliver a lasting legacy and a development that creates a real sense of place. We hope to get the Council’s approval to deliver that vision for this site and for the city centre.”

There are two major developments proposed on either side of Dundas Street. The first is New Town North on the site of the former Royal Bank of Scotland office.

The second is Centrum House which is on the opposite side of the street set back from the pavement with a sunken basement area where there are also some endangered trees.

FRRCA has launched a dedicated website, www.more-trees.info with a blindfolded teddy bear logo. They want the Council to uphold their planning policies and guidance, and the guidance of Historic Environment Scotland, which recommended redesign to reduce the negative impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site. They said: “Councillors must send the developers back to the drawing board to better recognise the sensitive nature of these sites.”

Judith Symes, FRRCA chair, commented: “At a time when we all need ready access to fresh air and quality green space for our physical and mental well-being, removing trees, and allowing crowding of our parks and world heritage buildings cannot be right. This ‘overbuilding’ must stop.”

Papers for the planning meeting next week can be found [here](#).