

Planning approval for Princes Street development – a forerunner of what is to come

The council today approved plans for a new development at the former Debenhams building on Princes Street with the addition to the rear which fronts Rose Street. The former Palace Hotel designed by John Lessels in 1869 will return to its former use after being involved in politics as the Liberal and Conservative clubs, and a retail store.

There was little discussion, and the plans for the £50 million development were recommended by officers for approval. Councillors including the planning convener, Cllr Neil Gardner, were very much in favour of the important development.

Edinburgh World Heritage had objected on the basis that the upper floors would have an adverse impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site. They considered that the existing buildings were already particularly tall and a further addition would be highly visible.

Historic Environment Scotland were more supportive in general. Their letter said: "Given the scope of the proposals, it is inevitable that some adverse or negative impacts will remain. Overall, we are content that that these would not have a significant damaging impact."

The hotel will have a rooftop bar restaurant, and there will be floors below devoted to some sort of keep fit, restaurant, meeting spaces, and retail. The development will be formed from the three listed properties at 109-112 Princes Street owned by Legal & General.



Anyone who ever stopped in Debenhams will be able to tell you that the layout was complicated, and looking at it from above it is clear that there are many bits added on at various times. The council officer presenting the plans with all the visuals explained that the roof space will be enlivened by using it as a rooftop bar, and the hope is very much that this will kickstart more development on Princes Street.

Part of the development is the formation of an arcade which will allow members of the public to walk through from Princes Street to Rose Street, with pop up retail occupying the walkthrough space.

The Planning Convener, Neil Gardner, said: "Princes Street is always evolving and the building has changed from a home to shops. There are now new opportunities for retail at St James Quarter and we have to accept change. Princes Street and Waverley Valley strategy and the City Centre Transformation will help to make Edinburgh a place to visit. The city's USP is Edinburgh Castle and this development fully uses the view with its rooftop bar and front facing windows. It signals that Edinburgh is open for enterprise and change, open for business and a sustainable future."

City Centre Ward councillor, Joanna Mowat lauded the Conservative connections in the building, using a quote from Disraeli in supporting the application.

"Change is inevitable in a progressive country. Change is constant; and the great question is not whether you still resist change which is inevitable, but whether that change shall be carried out in deference to the manners, the customs, the laws and the traditions of a people, or ... in reference to abstract principles and arbitrary and general doctrines". Disraeli 1867.

Cllr Mowat also referred to the stained glass window in the building which commemorates Lord Beaconsfield aka Disraeli. She told The Edinburgh Reporter: "It was moved when Debenhams was created and will be moved again through 90 degrees so there will be a light behind it. It will function as a stained glass window in the lounge bar." She also commented that this will be the best of the future while recognising the past, and could be a forerunner of what is to come on this street.

Nida Rehman, Development Manager for Legal & General, said, "We're obviously delighted with this decision which is both a

vote of confidence in our proposals and in the future of Princes Street itself. We would like to thank the council who we have worked closely alongside for a number of years and the local business community which came out strongly in support of the proposals.

This decision is another decisive step forward in the long-term relationship between Legal & General and the City of Edinburgh, and another example of our commitment to helping regenerate city centres throughout the UK. The buildings at 109-112 Princes Street have a bright future again as a must visit destination and experience for this and future generations of city residents and visitors.

There can be little doubt that the views from these magnificent buildings will be fantastic, but we are determined that the experience for people who come to visit, eat, shop, relax and simply spend time will be every bit as special.”

Construction work will begin in 2022 with the new boutique hotel scheduled to open in 2024.

