

New plans for Music School to be considered by the council

The former Royal High School at the foot of Calton Hill has been the subject of legal and planning wrangles for some years, and has been empty for more than half a century. It remains on the Buildings at Risk register.

Most recently the council decided to put the building back on the open market, seeking a development proposal which will ensure a sustainable long term future for the Greek Revival building. The Council insisted on proposals of the highest quality, and that any potential tenants take account of the Reporter's comments at the public inquiry. The [closing date for offers from prospective tenants](#) was on Friday.

With plans for a luxury hotel scuppered by planners, the Royal High School Preservation Trust has again put forward a proposal designed by Richard Murphy Architects that the Thomas Hamilton building is used for music education.

The trust has lodged plans for the restoration of the building to turn it into a "world-class centre for music education and public performance for the benefit of the whole of Scotland".

The plans show spaces for classical music education, community access, engagement and performance. This would allow St Mary's Music School to move from their large West End home to a newly developed centre. The music school idea was approved by

council planners previously, but at the time they had no legal right to occupy the building as it was held under a 125 year lease between the council who own it and Duddingston House Properties (DHP).

DHP proposed plans for a luxury hotel devised by the late Gareth Hoskins architect but these were refused by the council in 2015 and 2017. An appeal to the Scottish Ministers was unsuccessful.



The new plans can be viewed in full [here](#).

The proposal is backed by a donation of £55 million from the Dunard Fund and philanthropist Carol Colburn Grigor, (who are also the main backers of the proposed concert hall next to St James Quarter). This funding will cover the capital costs and future maintenance.

St Mary's Music School also plan to collaborate with other organisations such as the Benedetti Foundation, and IMPACT (International Music and Performing Arts Charitable Trust).

William Gray Muir, Chairman of The Royal High School

Preservation Trust said: “The restoration of the old Royal High remains one of the most exciting and important cultural developments in Edinburgh and indeed the whole of Scotland. Our goal is that as well as providing an exemplary use for the building, excellence in accessibility and inclusion will be absolutely central to the ethos of how the Royal High School is used.

“The passage of time from 2016 to 2021 has allowed us to consult on and revise some aspects of our design proposal and to evolve our ambitions for the building to create a vision for a new National Centre for Music. In doing so we have brought in new partners in IMPACT Scotland and the Benedetti Foundation, who with us and St Mary’s Music School see this project as a means to create an entirely new way for everyone to engage with and enjoy classical music and the arts. It has the potential to show Scotland and Edinburgh at a new vanguard of classical music education and cultural inclusion.

“To facilitate this expanded vision and lock in the economic sustainability of the plans, the Trust has received increased funding now totalling £55 million. We are enormously grateful to Dunard Fund and Carol Colburn Grigor for their unfailing generosity toward not just the RHSPT but other arts projects across Scotland. Their positive legacy will leave an indelible mark in Scotland’s cultural and economic landscape for generations to come.”



Dr Kenneth Taylor, Headteacher at St Mary's Music School, Scotland's national music school, said: "As partners of the project for the past six years, we have worked closely with the RHSPT to help evolve the vision for a National Centre for Music which will build strongly on our expertise for music education for the widest number of young people in Scotland. To be at the heart of the Trust's proposals, with a specially designed school building, performance and rehearsal spaces, as well as new opportunities for our pupils to engage with the wider community is simply exhilarating. The school is energised by the prospect of a new centre for music on Calton Hill."

Joanna Baker, Executive Director, IMPACT Scotland said: "The National Centre for Music is genuinely world-class in ambition, excellence and access and allows Edinburgh to continue to assert itself on the world stage. We're particularly excited that new ways of collaborating with St Mary's Music School educationalists at the former Royal High School building also opens out very interesting possibilities and links with Dunard Centre's partners."

