

Fewer buildings at risk now than ten years ago

According to new figures released today by The City of Edinburgh Council, only two Category 'A' listed buildings will remain 'at risk' in the World Heritage Site once current or planned restoration work is complete – down 14 from a decade ago.

In 2012, there were 16 Category 'A' listed buildings on the Buildings at Risk Register (BARR), which has been maintained by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) since 1990.

The buildings, which are deemed to be of 'international significance' and include Riddle's Court, Acheson House and the former Donaldson's School for the Deaf, have been repaired, refurbished and brought back into public use, following long periods lying vacant.



Riddles Court

The Virgin Hotels development in the Old Town, which is due for completion in the spring, will remove four buildings from the register, including the landmark India Buildings and the 160 year old Cowgatehead Free Church, while the globally renowned Old Royal High School on Regent Terrace has planning permission in place to bring it back into use as a music school, saving five buildings in the process.

Planning Convener Neil Gardiner said: “We work extremely hard with our partners, including Edinburgh World Heritage and Historic Environment Scotland to protect our historic built environment, and with owners to support them to find the best outcome for their properties.

“Over the last ten years, we’ve helped developers make the best and most sympathetic use of many of our globally significant and architecturally stunning buildings so they can be enjoyed now and for future generations to come.

“You only have to walk around the centre of our beautiful Capital city to see the progress being made and restoration works completed on the ground to breathe new life into these historic and iconic buildings.

“The plan for the Old Royal High School is a fantastic example of this, restoring it to its original glory as a place of learning for our young people. And, I’ve been very impressed by work on the upper floors of 30 Princes Street as a hotel with restoration of the gilded globe roof sculpture on the corner of the former Forsyth’s department store.

“It’s also good to see several properties in central Edinburgh restored to residential use and that Scottish Historic Buildings Trust is using the picturesque Category ‘A’ listed merchant’s tenement, Riddle’s Court, in the Lawnmarket as their headquarters.”



Donaldsons School is now converted to flats and apartments
Photo: www.martinmcadam.com

Depute Leader Cammy Day added: “The significant progress in bringing these iconic buildings back to life and returning them to public use demonstrates the value of development in our wonderful World Heritage site – but if it’s the right kind of development. It’s also a massive endorsement of the city’s economic buoyancy and resilience that, despite the recession and the current impacts of the Covid pandemic, these developments remain viable.

“I’ve seen first-hand the impressive progress being made by Virgin Hotels on the site of the old India Buildings on Victoria Street – and the care and attention being devoted to preserving the original features in a building that had sadly fallen into disrepair.

“It’s thanks also to close working between our planners, Edinburgh World Heritage and the developer, that we were able to save the Cowgatehead Free Church, which is set to be restored as an events space and a central part of the local community once more.”

A spokesperson for Edinburgh World Heritage said: “It is

welcome news that so many of the city's 'at risk' buildings have been conserved and given a new lease of life in order to benefit Edinburgh's people, institutions and economy. This all supports our goal of protecting what makes the World Heritage Site special, while also ensuring that the site works for everyone in the city.

"We have first-hand experience of the value of repurposing Edinburgh's historic properties. In 2011 we moved our offices into the wonderful 17th century Acheson House, following a major programme of conservation work to take this building off the 'at risk' register; it had lain empty for years but is now a busy office and library space.

"As a city partner, Edinburgh World Heritage has been delighted to lend our expertise when working with the Council to conserve and protect the city's most important historic buildings, and we hope that our partnership will continue to benefit Edinburgh's buildings and people for many years to come."

Iain Anderson, Deputy Head of Survey and Recording at Historic Environment Scotland (HES), said:

"We actively encourage the reuse of historic buildings and work closely with the City of Edinburgh Council to identify pressures and opportunities within the historic environment.

"The Buildings at Risk Register is used to raise awareness of the regeneration of historic buildings through the promotion of their repair and reuse. The Register helps us understand the pressures on Scotland's built heritage and acts as a catalyst to link potential restorers and redevelopers with suitable buildings and sites, as well as raising awareness and encouraging sustainable end use.

"We hope that the number of at-risk buildings on the Register will continue to be reduced."



The former Royal High School. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam
www.martinmcadam.com

Full list of buildings in the World Heritage Site currently being worked on and those restored and brought back to life in the last ten years:

The Old Royal High School is to become a music school

India Buildings on Victoria Street will shortly reopen as a hotel

The City Observatory is now an art gallery for contemporary art

The former Donaldson's School for the Deaf, including the gate lodges, has been restored and transformed into housing

Riddle's Court in the Lawnmarket is now the headquarters of Scottish Historic Buildings Trust

Acheson House is home to Edinburgh World Heritage

Panmure House is now Heriot Watt's Edinburgh Business school

Upper floors of 30 Princes Street, including the gilded globe roof sculpture of the former Forsyth's department store, are now a hotel

27 and 29-31 Melville Street has been turned into offices

9 Rutland Square has been brought back into residential use

26 Heriot Row has been brought back into residential use

8 Blenheim Place has been brought back into residential use

1-3 Baxter's Place is now a hotel

42 St Andrew Square is now the Edinburgh Grand, a luxury all-apartment residence.