

Residents object to developers' plans for temporary office block

Ediston, the company which is developing the former Royal Bank of Scotland building at the foot of Dundas Street, plans to create a temporary four or five storey office accommodation block on Dundas Street while their New Town Quarter development progresses.

Ross McNulty, Development Director at Ediston, wrote to local residents updating them on the plans. He explained that Ediston have been "in dialogue with the contractor for some time to try and figure out the best approach to their site set-up".

He continued: "It would appear from the programming discussions that if they try to keep the accommodation within the confines of the site, it significantly prolongs the building programme (as they will have to sacrifice space that would be occupied by a building and hence would have to build it out later). I am sure you will want us to try and keep the building programme as short as possible, which is why we are exploring the accommodation in this location."

Ediston confirmed that the cabins would be located above the pavement, with a gantry system allowing pedestrians to safely

walk underneath (and it would be well lit at night).

The cabins would be erected in front of the intended buildings.

Mr McNulty concluded: "It's quite a common arrangement on city centre sites, but we wanted to share this with you in advance and for you to have the opportunity to let us know if you have any comments."

The neighbours do indeed have comments about this proposal as do the local community council.

OBJECTIONS

Locals already objected to the entire development before planning approval was granted. Their objections ensured that changes to the plans were made including a reduction in the number of floors in the new building fronting Dundas Street. Now, residents are combining forces once more to try and ensure that a temporary building over the pavement, and encroaching on the street with a pedestrian underpass does not happen.



The former RBS building on Dundas Street photographed during demolition from the George V park PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

The Fettes Row & Royal Crescent Association wrote to the developer saying that this arrangement would create an “unnecessary and extensive street clutter”.

This is the text of their letter to the developer:

“They amount to unnecessary and extensive street clutter. The process of planning this project should surely have planned adequate accommodation for the duration of the project. If this is not the case, the failure will amount to further inconvenience, disruption, pollution and loss of amenity for local residents over and above that already being endured by local businesses and residents.

“Despite your point that the ‘tunnel’ underneath the proposed accommodation will be lit and provide adequate space to pass

through, it will still amount to a significant obstruction to the passage of pedestrians and traffic, possibly resulting in pedestrians having to walk on the roadway at very busy times. The obstruction in this location will cause a sclerosis of traffic on a very busy thoroughfare. Dundas St. is a route for public and tourist buses, delivery lorries and, critically, ambulances and fire engines. The current tunnel walkway on George IV bridge, similar to that you propose, is partially dark at night, and does not feel safe or comfortable for pedestrians at night-time;

“The presence of the accommodation will result in a prolonged loss of parking spaces in front of the site. This will further congest the limited parking available to residents and business in the area;

“Why is this project unable to accommodate its workers on site when other huge developments locally (eg the St. James Centre) have managed to execute their works without intruding further on local surroundings?

“There are areas (admittedly limited) which are planned to be open areas in the completed project. Why can these not be used to house the accommodation? Furthermore, why can't the project's use of Centrum House continue in effect as accommodation for contractors?

“The site development will be phased and accommodation could, and should be moved within the site, as phases progress.

“You say the local residents will benefit from the location of the accommodation on Dundas St. Frankly any benefit residents would receive, and that would be questionable, would be at the margins, given the wholesale long term disruption to life and amenity this project is already causing by its execution. The only beneficiary of the proposal we can see, in fact, is the developer who will save costs which might or might not have been incurred by inadequate planning. In any event, we can see

no benefit which would go any where near compensating residents for the inconvenience this plan would cause.

“Yours sincerely, Judith Symes, acting chair, for and on behalf of the Fettes Row and Royal Crescent Association”

New Town and Broughton Community Council

The community council discussed the proposal at their August meeting.

Their letter to the developer points out that it is difficult to know exactly where the accommodation block would be built, that it might encroach on the taxi rank at the bottom of Dundas Street and that it appears to them that the structure would be around 15 metres high and 50 metres long on the pavement.

NTBCC are “unconvinced” that any such structure would shorten the construction period and wonder why it is not possible to accommodate the services within the three hectare site which runs from the cycle path at George V Park to Dundas Street.

The thoughts are that the offices would only benefit the developer but cause clear detriment to the local residents and visual intrusion in the New Town Conservation Area.



The former RBS building on Dundas Street photographed during demolition from the George V park PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

The site was purchased from Royal Bank of Scotland in May 2019, with Ediston and Orion Capital Managers working together on a shared vision for the important 6-acre city centre site.

Current proposals include 117 new homes, 144 Build to Rent units, affordable housing, 85,000sq ft office and a hotel. The proposals were subject to major public engagement with the local community and stakeholders.

A Detailed Planning Application for the development proposals was submitted on 31st August 2020.

Demolition of the existing buildings is ongoing although most of the main part of the building fronting Dundas Street has now been flattened. Construction was initially forecast for late 2021, with a 3-year build-out period, but presumably that

will be delayed by a year.

We have asked Ediston for further comment following the reaction of the local residents group and the community council.