

New move on The George Portobello to remove listed building status

The owner of The George on Bath Street in Portobello has lodged an application to have the building removed from the list of buildings of historical interest.

The T Bowhill Gibson building constructed in 1938 was designated a C listed building in 1974. Listed building records provide an indication of the special architectural or historic interest of a listed building.

Buckley Building UK Ltd who have put the building up for sale following failed moves to obtain planning permission have submitted a note with their application. In this they draw comparisons with other cinemas in Edinburgh and Ayr where the listed building status was removed allowing the property to be turned into residential developments. The note is embedded below.

Friends of the George (FoTG) was set up to find a way of retaining the building as a cinema in Portobello which formerly had five independent cinemas. With a steering group made up of locals the group claims significant community support for the purchase and refurbishment of the building.

Speaking on behalf of FoTG, Mikey Davidson, Chair, said: "We are disappointed to learn that the developer is pursuing the removal of The George's listed status while simultaneously

marketing it for sale: we had hoped that they were committed to finding a restoring purchaser for the building. Their application appears to be supported by information previously submitted in the context of a number of failed attempts to gain consent from the Local Authority to substantially demolish the building to further their commercial interest in developing the site with 20 private flats. We hope HES will reaffirm The George's special historical, cultural and architectural interest by rejecting the application."

"We continue to try and secure access to conduct a professional valuation with a view to making an offer to purchase so that we can progress our ambitious plan to restore and adapt the original Art Deco building and operate it as a community-driven, multi-purpose venue, focused on the art of the moving image."

Earlier the Friends group explained the up to date position: ""Friends of The George have formally noted interest in acquiring the building, as a 'restoring purchaser'. Linked to that, we have commissioned a valuation, with a view to submitting a formal offer thereafter. We hope to secure ownership so that we can progress our plans to restore and operate The George as a community-driven independent cinema, and beyond that as a multi-purpose venue offering facilities for recreation alongside training, employment and professional development in Scotland's expanding moving image industries. Our vision for The George seeks to complement, not replicate, other community facilities in Portobello to serve an ever expanding population and develop a resilient town centre."

The full listing for the former cinema is:

"A prominent building within the locality, by an important Scottish Architect of the Inter-War period, who was Edinburgh's leading cinema designer. On the plans the centre

bays, flanking the tower are seen to be taller than outer bays but not as tall as the tower. "The original facing block (currently brilliant white) was in two shades of light blue, and the 33' high advertising tower was entirely glazed, and illuminated at night from inside by means of cyclo troughing, giving constantly changing pastel hues. The top of the building was outlined by a thin line of neon tubing, and the remainder of the facade was floodlit by lights hidden behind the canopy." C McKean, (1987), p 67-68. The cinema opened in 1939; it was refurbished and renamed the George in 1954; it has been closed as a cinema since 1974 and has run as a bingo hall since then. The original facade has been reduced in height and the central tower removed, (CTA, 2008). References and notes updated as part of the Cinemas Thematic Study 2007-08."

When appealing against a planning decision last year Buckley explained to the Scottish Ministers that despite all attempts the building would lose some historical value. The planning statement said: "It is hugely regretful, but none the less remains an irrefutable fact, that the essential structural engineering remedial operations cannot be implemented on this listed building without the wholesale removal of the remaining interior finishes including the period ornamentation which has contributed significantly to the listed status of the property.

"Expert opinion, with access to all relevant scientific and technical data gleaned from extensive intrusive exploratory operations is united on this fundamental principle. There will be unavoidable facilitating works damage to the historic fabric to gain access to the structure of the property, and, by simple implication, this will lead to a diminution of the historic value of the building."



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