

Revised plans will be drawn up for the former Royal High School

Businessman William Gray Muir has stepped down as Chair of the Royal High School Preservation Trust just as it is announced that revised plans to create a National Centre for Music and Concert Hall in the building on Regent Road are being drafted.

The history of the building is long and tortuous, and came to an abrupt stop recently when it was announced that St Mary's Music School would not be moving from their extensive West End premises to the East end. The reasons were said to be financial. The building has now been empty for almost 60 years since the Royal High School itself moved out to a new campus in Barnton.

The project is directed by The Royal High School Preservation Trust (RHSPT) set up to do just that – preserve the council-owned building for the future who are now tenants in a long lease from the council. Meantime uses have included storage of ballot boxes and as a one off venue for Hidden Door Festival. The National Centre for Music element was always included in the Music School plans but now it will become the sole use. In terms of the lease entered into between RHSPT and the council there has to be an educational element.

In an earlier statement RHSPT said: “Under criteria set by City of Edinburgh Council, any proposals for the future of the building had to ensure a sustainable long-term future for the old Royal High School and be of the highest architectural quality.

“Councillors agreed in October 2021 that the RSHPT’s plan to create a new National Centre for Music on the site amply fulfilled those criteria, while offering a shared vision for the creation of a new platform for musical collaborations, both within the building, online and out in the wider community.”

Plans will show a 300 seat concert hall with performance, rehearsal and break out spaces. New public gardens and a restaurant café are also included.

With a new chair the building will no longer be the venue for a private music school for less than a hundred pupils and instead will be offered for public use. The £45 million financial backing (with a further endowment of £10 million towards running costs) comes from Carol Grigor of Dunard Fund who is also contributing multi millions to the new Concert Hall just off St Andrew Square.

Ms Grigor said: “The National Centre for Music will take its place confidently in Edinburgh’s cultural landscape, building on the city’s world-leading strengths as a UNESCO World Heritage City, a Festival City and a forward-looking city that creates opportunity. Dunard Fund is delighted to fund such a culturally significant project and one that will leave a lasting legacy not just for the Edinburgh region but for Scotland as a whole.”

Colin Liddell, trustee added: “Dunard Fund and the Board are very grateful to Willie Gray Muir for his leadership in creating the amazing opportunity and setting our vision for the future.”

Grant Mackenzie, CEO of the Royal High School Preservation Trust said: “Our aspiration is for the National Centre for Music to become a world leading cultural venue for musicians, no matter their background. The new National Centre for Music will engage teachers, community music organisations and professional performers to inspire the joy of music, nurture skills and foster innovation. Thanks to the generosity of Dunard Fund, we’re progressing to make this vision a reality.”

Council Leader Cammy Day said: “We are aware of the proposed change to the scheme and remain supportive of a project which will preserve a key historical building in the city.”

New plans will be lodged with the council in early 2024.





