

# **Councillor urges Historic Environment Scotland to “wake up and smell the coffee”**

**An Edinburgh councillor has launched a blistering attack on Historic Environment Scotland, urging it to “wake up and smell the coffee” over the climate crisis.**

The organisation was accused of not adequately responding to the climate emergency after it objected to a heat pump being installed in a New Town home – and of “patronising” residents by telling them to hang “thick curtains” instead of adapting properties with more energy-efficient heating systems.

Members of the council’s planning appeals committee reviewed an application for a roof extension to create extra space for an air source heat pump on Wednesday, June 5.

Officials previously refused permission, saying the plans would have a “detrimental impact” on the A-listed Great King Street building.

It came after Historic Environment Scotland (HES) said in an objection letter it could not support removing the existing Georgian roof as this would be a “considerable loss of original and historic fabric”.

The government-run body, which was set up to “investigate, care for and promote Scotland’s historic environment”, said while it encouraged “investment in renewable energy and air-

source heat pumps, we do not consider that the proposed thermal improvements outweigh the negative impact of the alterations”.

Cllr Chas Booth, Greens, argued that the applicant “should be congratulated,” adding: “If only more of our citizens came forward with an aim to reduce the emissions from their buildings in a sensitive and appropriate way.”

He said: “I’m disappointed that Historic Environment Scotland objected to this one.

“I think, frankly, Historic Environment Scotland need to wake up and smell the coffee – the climate emergency is here. They have not adequately responded to it and we do need to find ways to reduce emissions from historic buildings in a way that respects their character. This is a good example of that.

“[HES] telling people to install thick curtains and install wooden shutters is patronising nonsense, they should be totally ashamed that they haven’t got adequate guidance in place to genuinely address the climate emergency.

“I understand that this building is a listed and we have to be absolutely crucial about not doing anything that would undermine the important historical value of that, but I think this application is sensitive.”

Councillors unanimously agreed to overturn the refusal of planning permission. But despite this, due to an accompanying application for listed building consent being refused and thrown out on appeal to the Scottish Government, the works will not be allowed to go ahead.

The HES objection stated: “We would remove our objection if the plant equipment could be discretely located within the existing roof valley. We would need to assess the detail in any amended scheme. In looking at alternatives for the plant equipment, our primary consideration will be the physical and

visual impacts of the roof alterations.”

A Historic Environment Scotland spokesperson said: “At HES we champion the reuse and retrofit of historic buildings for the crucial role this has to play in achieving net-zero, and we encourage investment in renewable energy and air-source heat pumps.

“We provide advice and guidance to local authorities and developers about how this can be done without compromising the special character of listed buildings.

“We objected in this case as the proposed alterations would have significantly diminished the special architectural significance of this A listed building, removing an original roof structure to provide a new mansard roof with glazed dormer windows.

We were most supportive of the renewable energy element, but considered that the desired plant equipment could have been located within the roof valley without requiring the loss of the roof.

“The Scottish Government Reporter agreed with ourselves and the City Council who refused the application for listed building consent.

“We would support any new proposals to install renewable energy plant within the existing roof valley.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter