

# **George Cinema – campaigners appoint architects**

**The Friends of the George (FoTG), a group which is trying to get The Royal George Cinema reopened in Portobello, has appointed Glasgow-based architects, Loader Monteith, to lead a design team undertaking detailed feasibility work with the award of a grant from The Architectural Heritage Fund.**

The work will enhance the in-depth commercial and operational assessment being undertaken by independent cinema consultants, Mustard Studios, whose work is being funded by a grant from the Scottish Land Fund.

Loader Monteith approached Stefanie Fischer, a leading cinema architect within the UK's independent cinema sector to join their team as a subconsultant. Her expertise as a cinema architect complements the expertise of Loader Monteith Architects as conservation architects.

The appointment of the Loader Monteith led team is another step in the long running campaign by FoTG who have been working to save the art deco former cinema from demolition. With support from the community, FoTG hope to acquire and restore the C-listed building, and operate it as a cinema for the community. These latest commissions will develop and

refine the group's ambitious plans and will also include input from educational and film industry partners.

Mike Griffiths, Friends of the George Chair said: "We are delighted to be able to appoint such an expert team of professionals to develop and refine our proposals as we continue to point the way towards a positive future for The George not only in the heart of the community of Portobello, but more broadly, to play a role in the cinema sector in Scotland. The consultants we have working on this bring extensive expertise and experience to the project and will be led by a firm of architects with a burgeoning reputation for exciting contemporary architectural design, deployed to breathe new life into historic buildings. We're extremely grateful for the financial support we have received from the Architectural Heritage Fund, the Scottish Land Fund and our benefactor Victoria Schwab."

Iain King, Specialist Conservation Architect and Director at Loader Monteith: "We are pleased to have been selected as the lead architects, alongside our expert team of consultants, to support the Friends of The George in developing the proposal for the George Cinema. Despite the building currently being on the Buildings at Risk Register, it benefits from strong community support and the dedication of the Friends of The George, a group committed to preserving this Art Deco gem and restoring it as a sustainable, independent cinema. We look forward to collaborating with them on this important project."

Last year, Friends of The George Limited had the cinema building formally valued by a firm of professional surveyors and made an offer to purchase it as a "restoring purchaser", based on that valuation. Funds for purchase were very generously offered by benefactor, writer V.E Schwab.

This offer was rejected by the current owners of the building who have tried – and failed – twice in recent years to secure consent to substantially demolish The George and develop the

site with luxury flats.

Most recently, last October, the owner tried to force Historic Environment Scotland (HES) to delist the building. HES confirmed that the building continues to meet the criteria of special architectural and historic interest and so there will be no statutory change to the current 'C' listing designation.

Recent silent, community protests, independent of the FoTG group, have called on the current owner of the building to clear up the mess outside of the cinema and to address the continued neglect and dereliction of the building.



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George Cinema