



EDINBURGH WORLD HERITAGE

## Edinburgh World Heritage

City of Edinburgh Council Planning Committee 6<sup>th</sup> February 2008  
Comments and Advice on the proposed Caltongate Redevelopment

My name is Jane Jackson and I am Acting Director of Edinburgh World Heritage Trust. The Trust is grateful to the Planning Committee for giving it the opportunity to make this presentation.

### Edinburgh World Heritage

Edinburgh World Heritage is a charitable company established by Historic Scotland and the City of Edinburgh Council to champion the care and conservation, and promote the understanding of, the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site. It also has a direct role with regard to the care and maintenance through its conservation funding programme and as part of UNESCO's requirement to monitor the state of conservation of the World Heritage Site.

### World Heritage Sites- Policy and Protection

There are only 851 cultural and natural properties on the World Heritage Site List. Edinburgh was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in December 1995. 'The Committee decided to inscribe the property on the basis of criteria (ii) and (iv) as it represents a remarkable blend of two urban phenomena: the organic medieval growth and 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century town planning'.

#### **\*(SLIDE 2)**

This is not a one off award, something to display in the cabinet, but the beginning of an ongoing commitment to the care and management of the world heritage site to ensure that its 'universal values' are maintained for all to understand and appreciate.

The Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas (1998), published by Historic Scotland, sets out Scottish Government policy on World Heritage in Scotland. In section 2.24 it states very clearly that '*there are no additional statutory controls arising from a site gaining World Heritage status. However, the outstanding importance of such a site will be a key material consideration for planning authorities in determining applications for planning permission and listed building consent as well as for the Secretary of State in determining appeals or call in cases*'.

The stated aim of inscription, included in the Council's own World Heritage Manifesto, and I quote is the '*better protection and safeguarding of World Heritage Sites, so the immediate and obvious benefit of international listing is to strengthen the hand of those who are committed to their protection and enjoyment*'. The Manifesto also envisages controlled development and harmonious adaptation to contemporary life. The intention of the Manifesto is to, again I quote, '*represent a statement of the Council's commitment to the conservation and protection of the World Heritage Site and the Council's acceptance of its responsibilities as guardian of a World Heritage Site*'. The Manifesto is included in the Council's Development Quality Handbook and is the only local planning policy guidance on the World Heritage Site.

In July 2005 Edinburgh World Heritage published a Management Plan to guide the future management and maintenance of the World Heritage Site. It was written with, and endorsed by, the Trust's partner agencies – Historic Scotland, City of Edinburgh Council, Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian (SEEL) and Edinburgh City Centre Management Company (CCMC). The Management Plan sets out the Outstanding Universal Values which make Edinburgh the unique place that it is. These values include its landscape setting where the topography of hills and the Waverley Valley frame the juxtaposition of the Old Town and the New Town. **\* (Slide 3)** The contrasting character in the urban form is expressed in its townscape and its historic buildings and their interiors, its statues and monuments, and its parks, gardens and graveyards. Edinburgh's World Heritage Site is also founded on its heritage, history and its communities. The people and institutions who worked and lived, and people who work and live here now, give the buildings, closes, courtyards and the streets their sense of place.

There is an obligation on the State Party, the Scottish Government, to ensure that these Outstanding Universal Values are protected and maintained as part of the responsibility of being inscribed on the World Heritage List.

The Management Plan recognizes that, as a living capital city, Edinburgh will inevitably grow and adapt. However, its World Heritage status and the maintenance of its Outstanding Universal Values, should be the overarching context in bringing forward new development. Regeneration of the Canongate/New Street area represents an opportunity to use an understanding of the very special heritage and character of Edinburgh as the context for place making. Embracing the past to enhance the future will secure Edinburgh's unique appeal in the world and continue to distinguish the city from all others. Edinburgh's heritage is a fundamental part of the success of Edinburgh's economy.

#### **Canongate Development (\*Slide 4).**

Over the past two and half years Edinburgh World Heritage officers and board members have received presentations on what has become known as the Canongate development. As a consequence, they have made representations to the developer, to planning officials, and to the Planning Committee outlining their concerns regarding the scale and design of the proposed redevelopment and the impact the proposals, if implemented, would have on the Outstanding Universal Values of the World Heritage Site. These concerns were expressed at the very first meeting when it was clear that the size and ambition of proposed development was on a grand scale.

The Trust recognises that changes have been made, both to the initial masterplan, and most recently in amendments to the planning applications. However although there has been a minimal reduction in the impact of the development, in no way would new buildings of the scale and design still proposed conserve or enhance the established character of the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh. These buildings and public spaces would still have a severe detrimental impact upon that character and therefore on the World Heritage Site.

The urban form of the Old Town is recognised in the World Heritage inscription as being as important as that of the New Town. The preservation of the spine and rib pattern of the Royal Mile and the closes has been maintained over the centuries, and respect for the traditional street patterns, building lines and existing physical fabric has been integral over the past 100 years to the work of Patrick Geddes, the City Architect Ebenezer McCrae, Robert Hurd, and indeed through to Richard Murphy and John Hope in recent years. The organic plan form of

the Old Town is one of the fundamental characteristics recognised by the UNESCO inscription and the Council's World Heritage Manifesto.

Appropriate infill and, where necessary, redevelopment which promotes good contemporary expression, which takes contextual clues from, and is respectful of its historic surroundings, is recognised by UNESCO and by our organisation as part of the continuing life of a living growing city like Edinburgh. The proposed extensive redevelopment would erode the distinctiveness of the Old Town in a number of ways:

- Setting of the Waverley Valley. The horizontal emphasis of the design of the buildings in the Caltongate development and the insufficient regard to the stepped form of development in the Waverley Valley has a detrimental effect on the setting of the Waverley Valley and the important divide between the Old and New Towns.
- The large building footprint and scale of the proposed hotel, offices, residential blocks and the Square, and the proposed 5.8 metre high break in the Canongate all mean that the opportunity to truly reinforce the character of the Old Town using the traditional scale of building and street patterns to guide and to knit the new into the old has not been realised. These physical elements are integral to the special character of the Old Town and to the Outstanding Universal Values for which Edinburgh was inscribed on the World Heritage list. The Trust recognises the need for connectivity and permeability, but this could have been achieved with respect for existing urban forms. The Old Town has a strong sense of place, in which architecture, townscape, cultural and historic traditions are all a part. This has been consciously built up and reinforced over the centuries, retaining much of the medieval plan form and this continuity helps define the City's identity.
- The demolition of Listed Buildings together with a 'facadism' approach is a severely detrimental aspect of the development. The loss of the listed Sailors Ark and the former Canongate School shows a disregard for buildings which are both suited to re-use/refurbishment. The re-use of these buildings is clearly the optimal sustainable solution for the future of the site. The limited information that has been made available to the Trust makes no economic case for demolition and redevelopment. There are insufficient facts and figures to support the argument. Statements from consultants and agents are not backed by real evidence. A careful approach is needed that should encompass the conservation and World Heritage aspects as well as looking at options for re-use, and ensuring that the historic environment is really at the heart of what is proposed. Retention of facades is not an answer.
- Facadism. A two storey high arcade alternative (5.8 metres high at the centre) to the previous application for a full height break/total demolition is proposed between 221-223 Canongate. **\*(slide 5)** This claims to retain the upper two storeys of the Canongate McCrae tenement but is effectively the demolition of the building leaving only a stone face to modern large apartments. This 'facadism' approach on the Canongate is also employed in the adjacent 'retained' tenement properties and for the listed Sailors Ark. Once you are left with only a front wall you have effectively lost the building. The criteria to be considered for demolition in a conservation area, outlined in policy Env1 of the Finalised City of Edinburgh Local Plan (March 2007), do not support this aspect of the application. It is certainly not work of the scope and quality to be promoted in a

UNESCO World Heritage City, where there is an obligation to respect the authenticity and integrity of the historic environment.

The Old Town has a strong sense of place in which architecture, townscape, cultural and historic traditions are integral to its character. It has been consciously built up and reinforced over the centuries and this continuity helps define the City's identity. In bringing forward the regeneration of this sensitive site a careful approach to plan and design is needed that should encompass the conservation and context of the World Heritage Site. The Improvement Streets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the impetus for slum clearance do not match the applicant's economic imperative to get a footfall and easy access to the hotel, offices and shops.

In reviewing the amended applications the Trust has seen some revision of design details, but nothing that addresses its principal objections – all previously expressed during the consultation on the master plan and the applications. The Trust considers that the shortcomings in the design are so detrimental to the character of this part of the World Heritage Site that we do not believe that this can be addressed through any condition that might be applied to the grant of planning permission.

The Trust urges the Council to reject these applications and to work to develop a vision for the regeneration of this part of the city centre and the World Heritage Site which would conserve the character of the area, reinforce the identity of the city and the lives of the local community. Edinburgh City Council should require a development which would Embrace the Past to Enhance the Future.