

THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND



FOR THE STUDY AND PROTECTION OF SCOTTISH ARCHITECTURE

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OBJECTION TO CALTONGATE PLANNING PROPOSALS

The Society welcomes the regeneration of the former New Street Bus Station but has remained consistently disappointed by the Caltongate Consultation process, the resultant masterplan and the quality of the architecture proposed in the planning applications now being considered.

The consultation process did not engage with either the local community or other stakeholders and was more of a PR exercise for the developer-led masterplan. No alternatives were explored despite the developer commissioning proposals on a variety of architectural practices. The Caltongate masterplan was not conceived as a “**Collaborative, conservation-led approach**” as recommended in **NPPG18** (par.27) but as a developer-led proposal that created a large, cleared site within the Old Town Conservation Area and World Heritage Site and maximised the profitability of the construction site. It lacks the sensitivity and subtlety of the nearby masterplans for North Holyrood and Moray House. The former has successfully achieved a vibrant mix of uses that manages to incorporate our industrial heritage and enhance the delightful complexity of our Old Town streets and closes.

The demolition of the Canongate Venture and Sailor’s Ark continues a story of destruction that started last April. These will be the fifth and sixth listed buildings accepted for demolition by the City within 10 months despite **the Edinburgh Local Plan Policy ENV1** stating that “**the loss of a listed building will only seldom be justified**” (par 4.7). These buildings have all been structurally sound but economically inconvenient when compared to a cleared site. **NPPG18** acknowledges that historic buildings may not be the most profitable, but states that this does not provide a valid reason for demolition. The Canongate Venture building provided a valuable Small Business and Community resource and is structurally sound. No attempt has been made to incorporate it within the redevelopment of New Street. The former school forms part of the area’s rich architectural heritage providing the variety that is highlighted as worthy of preservation and enhancement within the **Old Town Conservation Area Appraisal**. The school could have a number of new uses, and accommodate adaptation similar to the acclaimed Siobhan Davies Dance Studio in Southwark, London.

The reduction of the Sailor’s Ark building and the Ebenezer Macrae tenements to mere façades is a very ill advised approach to historic buildings. It irrevocably compromises historical authenticity, and is hardly the rich experience for which Edinburgh is known. Numbers 4 and 5 St Andrew Square were reduced to façades in 1993 only to have an application for demolition accepted in 2007, because façades are recognised to be of less value. As a consequence, façade retention can only be regarded as a method of staged demolition.

The hotel and conference centre proposed to replace these buildings are not of a sufficient design quality to merit consideration. The same exterior treatment of both buildings is particularly critiqued in the **Old Town Conservation Area Appraisal**, which warns against having one building type covering multiple plots. The use of two architects on this building has resulted in conjoined, decorated sheds. Stating that the hotel, conference centre and new office buildings will provide new jobs is not an economic argument for the demolition of the historic buildings, as it has not been supported by the provision of evidence. Destroying the very essence of the area’s attractiveness, the variety and complexity of the architecture may, in fact, damage tourism, which is a key source of economic growth in the area. A sensitive and intelligent development, which is well integrated into the existing Old Town fabric, and which responds to and enhances the charm of the existing listed buildings, will bring as many jobs to the area, without risking damage to tourism.

The Society encourages the Planning Committee to observe heritage principles, to prevent the demolition of valuable historic buildings and to ensure that the legacy they leave to the city is of the highest possible quality.

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