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Head of Planning & Strategy
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Your Ref: 08/00197

Our Ref: HGG/A/LA/1169

07 Apr 2008

Dear Sir

**PLANNING (LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS) (SCOTLAND)
ACT 1997
BUILDINGS OF SPECIAL ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC
INTEREST/UNLISTED BUILDINGS WITHIN CONSERVATION AREAS
7 CLERK STREET, EDINBURGH**

I refer to your letter of 06 Feb 2008 seeking comments on an application in respect of the proposed partial demolition and conversion of former cinema (in part) and new development to create hotel (incorporating bar/restaurant facilities), artists studios/galleries, community facilities at the above property.

Historic Scotland offers the following comments on this proposal.

The Odeon was designed in 1929 by the noted cinema architect William Trent (1874-1948) and opened the following year as the New Victoria. It is one of Scotland's two surviving 'atmospheric' cinemas, designed to create the illusion of being outside, in this case within a classical landscape. Although the building has been subdivided to create additional cinemas, much of the later work has respected, or not unduly harmed, the original interior. It closed as a cinema in 2003, and was intermittently used afterwards during the Edinburgh Festival.

Although currently listed Category B, we believe the building appears to be of national importance, but would not normally change a listing category whilst there is an extant application. It is safe to say, however, that it is the finest surviving cinema building in Edinburgh.

We welcome the preparation of the Conservation Plan, submitted as part of this application.

Historic Scotland, Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh, EH9 1SH
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk



The Conservation Plan is useful in gauging the importance of the building in national terms, along with giving a detailed architectural and historical analysis. The Plan grades the crush hall and the café to be of moderate significance, but judges the façade and the auditorium to be of considerable importance, having ‘a high degree of intact original fabric that contributes substantially to the importance of the building or site overall’. The plan recommends that such elements should be ‘respected, repaired and restored where possible’.

Regarding the proposed scheme, we welcome the repair and restoration of the front façade together with the internal works of restoration to the crush hall and the café. We have no concerns over the proposed new building to Buccleuch Street, or the loss of the fly-tower element to the rear of the main auditorium. With the auditorium, the Planning and Design Statement notes that ‘the removal of the historic interior is the only means to unlock the future of the building and bring it back to viable use’, noting that the auditorium cannot operate in isolation. If the auditorium was of no architectural or historic interest, we would not hesitate in supporting a scheme such as this which retains the external walling of the existing building, providing a new use within. However, in this case, although the external brick walling itself is of limited interest, the internal spatial quality and architectural features of the auditorium form a major element of the listed building’s special interest, or as the Conservation Plan has it ‘contributes substantially to the importance of the building’.

Within the Memorandum of Guidance, demolition is noted as the destruction or substantial destruction of a whole building, and that the demolition of a ‘lesser part of the building’ should normally be classed as alteration. In discussing the loss of the auditorium we understand this has been viewed by your Council as being an integral or substantial part of the building.

NPPG18- Planning and the Historic Environment sets out a national policy for historic buildings, but advice on the demolition of a listed building is contained within paragraphs 2.10-2.14 of the Memorandum of Guidance. This provides the criteria for the consideration of the demolition of a listed building, and focuses on the a).importance of the building, b).condition of the building, and c). alternative uses for the building.

The building is B-listed, may be of national significance and its condition is fair, so any justification of the proposals must rely on the latter test. Your Council must therefore determine whether it has been shown ‘beyond doubt that it is not possible to adapt the existing building to accommodate any new use, or mix of uses that would safeguard its future and benefit the community’.

To summarise, we do not believe that the current proposal represents an acceptable conservation solution for the building. Indeed the loss of the principal space will significantly



erode its special interest. It remains possible, however, that this level of intervention is the minimum necessary to prevent the building being lost altogether but up until now we have not seen any information which demonstrates this clearly.

In order to justify such a harmful intervention on this ground, we would expect to see clear evidence that the building is incapable of supporting an alternative use which would allow the retention of the auditorium. This is of particular importance as we understand that a marketing exercise last year generated some interest in retaining the building without substantial demolition.

Regarding the above, we are prepared to write a letter of support regarding the amendment of the entertainment license, if this is helpful.

We trust this information clarifies our position and will ensure that we can move toward a resolution of this difficult case.

The relevant documents are returned herewith.

Yours faithfully


KEVIN TAIT

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