



## thecockburnassociation

Edinburgh's Civic Trust

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Dear Diana Garrett

15/05795/FUL | Proposals are to extend and re-model the current Scottish Collection Gallery in the plinth of the Scottish National Gallery. Works will include creating new stair links from the Playfair gallery above and opening up the new gallery space to the Weston link concourse in the plinth. An accessible route is to be formed in Princes Street Gardens down to a re-modelled lower level entrance together with public landscape re-modelling. | National Galleries of Scotland 1 The Mound Edinburgh EH2 2EL

The Cockburn Association has considered the proposals and wishes to make the following comments.

We are concerned by the strategy of putting both buildings on a plinth, something the James Taylor Partnership commendably avoided in the 1970s. However, the Playfair Project of 2002 by John Millar & Partners extended Taylor's scheme in a most unsatisfactory way, completely failing to make a coherent whole with the other, modern architecture. These proposals repeat the same disregard, bearing no relationship to the Millar scheme. If both were to accept they are creating a unifying plinth then they have to address this unfortunate visual dislocation. The buildings cannot sit on two plinths. Both schemes need to change to be more akin to landscape and less like a building.



RCAHMS

The Playfair image from 1860 shows the Scottish National Gallery floating above a well-developed tree canopy, two neoclassical edifices standing on the Mound against the dramatic backdrop of Edinburgh Castle.

Playfair's overall reduction of the visual impact of the railway will be compromised with the loss of trees, in particular the 3 fine healthy 45 foot Lime Trees. The effect of losing the aesthetic woodland east flank in exchange for an open axial neo-classical expression centred on the railway, which Playfair never intended, will intrude too aggressively in its scale and impact on the gardens and their broader prospect towards the Castle.

The proposal is contrary to the CEC Management Plan for Princes Street Gardens:

- CP3: Maintain and enhance the views and physical relationships between the gardens and adjoining streets, and public spaces, conserving the setting of the gardens; and
- CP8: Maintain and develop the Gardens essential character as a green, open and restful haven, for passive recreation, away from the hard enclosed and busy streets.

President: Sir Sandy Crombie  
Chair: Rt Hon Lord Brodie

Treasurer: Robert Cowan  
Director: Marion Williams

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Despite reassurances we repeat our previous concerns, with reference to the 2003 Act of Parliament, that tables should not spill out into the gardens, this has already proved to be the case and here an even larger space is given over for tables.

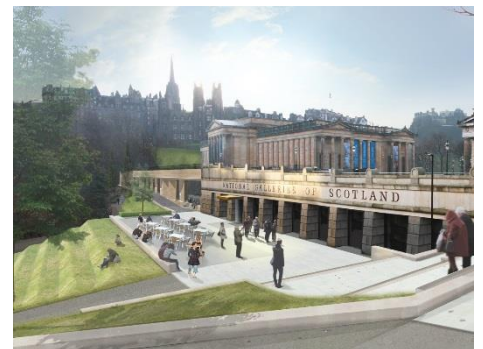


Rhona Brankin speaking in the Scottish Parliament promoting the Bill:

*"However, the promoters confirmed in evidence that they would take measures to prevent the commercial nature of the project from impinging on the gardens. For example, at night, the light levels from the new part of the galleries will be lowered and will be consistent with those from the other floodlit buildings around the gardens. Tables from the restaurant will not be situated in the gardens."*

The 2002 extension, intended to create education facilities and disabled access (down a flight of steps) resulted in a restaurant. It is ironic that a building created in 2003 to give disabled access, at a cost of £30m, now has to be extended to give disabled access.

What we see in these proposals is land being raised to form flat terraces, taking away the depth and drama of the steep banks that exist now. It won't be a Mound but a plaza.



The galleries were intended as objects in space in an undulating green landscape, rather than the 1980's onwards move towards creating an urban plaza around them at Princes Street level, with a masonry plinth wall in front. Not only does such a continuation of a masonry plinth complete a fundamental change to the relationship between the buildings as temples within a green valley park between old and new towns, towards that of buildings/plinth defining an urban edge to East Princes Street Gardens, but this also incrementally erodes green space within the gardens, with further hard surface terracing at intermediate level in front of this masonry wall which replaces the green banking of the Mound.

The green edges to Princes Street Gardens have the very satisfactory visual effect of making the park space an indeterminate size, providing a respite to the city above in all directions. Changing this to a hard edge, brings the garden space inwards, making the perception of it smaller. No longer another world, green and planted arcadia, rather part of the universal plaza world around about. This proposal in its current form is detrimental to the magical contrasting experience between city and undulating landscape that is Edinburgh.

The City of Edinburgh Council Confirmation Act 1991 may be superseded by the 2003 Act but it states that:

'... there shall not be constructed any permanent buildings other than the following: Lodges for gardeners and keepers, hothouses and conservatories, monuments, bandstands, public conveniences, police boxes, and buildings for housing apparatus for the supply of electricity and gas.'

We suggest that it may be time to review the vision for the Waverley Valley rather than see piecemeal interventions take place.

We ask that the proposals be modified so that the contrast between building and landscape, intended by William Playfair and celebrated as part of Edinburgh's ongoing contribution to experiencing building in well-defined landscape, is not further compromised.

Yours sincerely

Marion Williams  
Director

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