



Euan McMeeken & Carla Parkes

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29 September 2015

Dear Euan & Carla

Re: Proposals for the Old Royal High School 15/03989/FUL and 15/03990/LBC

The Cockburn Association has given careful consideration to these applications and strongly objects to them.

Hamilton's High School is carefully conceived in relation to Calton Hill and the other monuments around the hill. The elevation of the High School itself is symmetrical, the overall composition of buildings and monuments around Calton Hill is asymmetrical. This group forms Edinburgh's Acropolis: The Athens of the North. It is thus an important part of Edinburgh's World Heritage designation.

The location of the High School was deliberately placed between the New Town and Old Town to serve the whole town; yet set in arcadia, is not immediately of either. The dynamic composition of Calton Hill and the High School as standalone temple forms a green break between the terraces of Waterloo Place and those of Regent Terrace. This arrangement would be compromised with the addition of wing buildings at either side, making Hamilton's building part of a larger staggered horizontal terrace. With the proposals, views of the profile of the hill as it steps up from east to west will also be compromised. The proposed new blocks will not only be higher than the central High School building, but will be also be considerably higher than Playfair's adjacent Regent Terrace.

Significant concern exists regarding the proposals in undermining the integrity of the High School building which is acknowledged to be of international importance, being one of the most noted examples of European neo-classical architecture. As a 'temple to learning', limited fenestration to Regent Road contributes to the purity of the building. The sculptural quality of this elevation makes adaptation to a hotel very difficult, without undermining and compromising its important features.

A hotel is not a public building, access depends on management policies, which can change. This will not be a public building. The presumption will be that visitors will be consumers. Whilst an exclusive hotel serving patrons could bring economic benefits to Edinburgh, given an understanding of the history of how the High School, as a school serving the whole city, this is not an appropriate use for this civic asset. As an exemplary work of art, the design and purpose of the High School should be seen in its cultural context. After the Reformation, the intention was to make knowledge accessible across Scotland, through establishing schools in every parish. From an enlightened nineteenth century perspective the meritocratic intent of this institution, embodied as a work of art, sows early seeds for an egalitarian society. Edinburgh's High School building, as a temple to learning, is the architectural pinnacle of this enlightened policy. Rather than physical changes to its elevations, 'accessibility' for this landmark civic asset is about the overriding purpose of the building.

Youngson's 'The Making of Classical Edinburgh' (p.157) quotes the contemporary view of a councillor in 1823 regarding the establishment a new school at Canonmills for the New Town financed by considerable fees: *'The effect would evidently be to create a separation between the different classes of the Community, thereby destroying what has heretofore been one of the proudest Characteristics of the Scottish beneficial kind, both to persons of all ranks individually, and to the general character of the Nation'*. Following this a Town Council report of 1823 noted that to site a new school near Canonmills would be *'most exceedingly inconvenient for the inhabitants at large'*. The High School site was selected as it could serve the whole city.

In summary, there is a fundamental discord in the adaptation of a building with no windows to the view into a hotel. The High School building is protected as an internationally important example of architecture. The original brief for the developer was initially untested. Having now been worked through, the tabled proposals undermine the building's important relationship with its context. The volume of accommodation which is stated to be required indicates that the use of the building and site for a hotel is not appropriate.

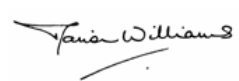
An alternative use which is compatible with this unique A listed building within Edinburgh's World Heritage Site has been brought forward. It is important that the Old Royal High School and the site are protected for current and future generations of Edinburgh's citizens and visitors.

These are our main concerns:

- we are disappointed to see the delightful entrance lodge demolished. This is not by Hamilton, but a very skilful and accomplished design in its own right which works very well within the set-piece design. It features pediments and has a front-on-all-sides approach contributing to the position at the foot of the hill access road and ties into the railings like Hamilton's front pavilions on Regents Road. It could be saved and worked into any scheme or might have a use unrelated to the main site occupier, such as a history centre for the Royal High or interpretation centre for Calton Hill. (ENV2)
- the new blocks are too high in relation to the centre building. They feature a lot of glass, for patrons to enjoy the view, and at night when lit this would disturb the whole idea of the dominant temple on a wild hill. Hamilton's building would be reduced to the lesser part. This is a question of scale and although this could be disguised somewhat by the elevation treatment it follows that at night, with individual rooms lit up, the scale would be clear. (DES 10)
- the composition sits very uncomfortably on the site. We note Historic Scotland's view that the western terrace should remain undeveloped so as to afford a side view of Hamilton's building. It would be more than a great shame if this were lost. The new elevation of the building's approach side from the Scottish Office weakens the superb spatial arrangement between all of these buildings, including Tait's "ocean liner" St Andrews' House. (DES 1, 10, 11, ENV 3, 6, 7)
- Hamilton's building already includes end pavilions terminating his composition. To put modern pavilions beyond these pavilions is quite unbalancing. The problem with any set piece of this type is that it was conceived perfectly and is a complete design that doesn't lend itself to extension. (DES 1, 10, 11, ENV 4)

Our conclusion on these proposals is that Gareth Hoskins has done the scoping exercise, which probably should have been done years ago, and proves that a viably-sized hotel does not work spatially or compositionally on this very special site.

Yours sincerely



Marion Williams
Director