

Planning Development Management Committee

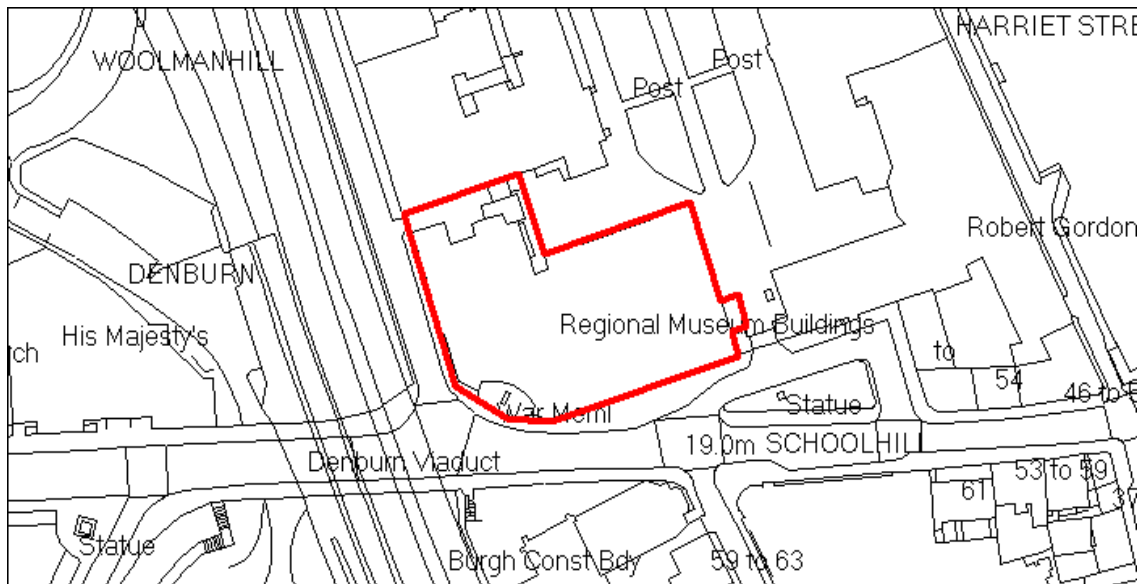
ABERDEEN ART GALLERY, SCHOOLHILL,
ABERDEEN

INTERNAL ALTERATIONS (INCLUDING
INSERTION OF NEW STAIR LIFTS AND
EXTENDING WAR MEMORIAL BALCONY)
DEMOLITIONS (INCLUDING EXISTING
GALLERY ROOFS, 1925 GALLERY
EXTENSION, AND 1970'S OFFICE
EXTENSION) AND EXTENSION (INCLUDING
NEW ROOFTOP GALLERY EXTENSION, ROOF
TERRACES AND EDUCATION, GALLERY AND
SUPPORT AREAS EXTENSION TO THE REAR
OF THE BUILDING

For: Aberdeen City Council

Application Type : Listed Building Consent
Application Ref. : P131246
Application Date: 21/08/2013
Officer: Tommy Hart
Ward : George Street/Harbour (A May/J
Morrison/N Morrison)

Advert : Listed Building
Advertised on: 04/09/2013
Committee Date:
Community Council : No response
received



RECOMMENDATION: Willingness to approve subject to conditions and refer application to Historic Scotland

DESCRIPTION

The existing Grade A Listed building is located in the heart of Aberdeen, adjacent to Union Terrace Gardens, at the junction of Schoolhill and Blackfriars Street.

To the north and east is the Robert Gordon's College and University. To the south is a landscaped area, the "pocket park", containing several mature trees and a statue of General Gordon and an access road to the school/university complex.

The site comprises the Gallery buildings, War Memorial, Cowdray Hall, hard landscaped areas at the War Memorial and a loading bay area to the rear (north).

The Gallery building was designed by A. Marshall Mackenzie and opened in 1885, it is widely considered a fine example of its type in Scotland (Historic Scotland http://data.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pls/htmldb/f?p=2200:15:0::::BUILDING,HL:19978,aberdeen_art_gallery). An outstanding 2-storey block of Renaissance style buildings, constructed in distinctive polished, grey granite ashlar with pink Correnie granite dressings and detailing linked by a vehicular arch. It has a moulded base course; rock-faced rusticated course rising to cill-course; moulded blocking course; plain ashlar frieze and moulded cornice. Architraved and corniced, astragalled fixed-pane windows run length of ground floor with decorative roundels above.

To the rear, there is a more modern extension which is finished in grey drydash render in need of updating both internally and externally and contrasts with the quality of design of principle buildings.

In terms of the interior, the Art Gallery has a fine central sculpture court with black and white marble stair as well as a distinctive colonnaded sculpture court with columns of different coloured granite. Above, there is a balustraded balcony.

The War Memorial, it is an octagonal court with a balustraded circular balcony at first floor level and giant, arched recesses rise to domed ceiling.

The Cowdray Hall has a curving, stepped stage area with pneumatic pipe organ. It has a doric-columned basement level with geometric plasterwork ceiling. There are also decorative cast-iron balustrades to the hallway stairs and predominantly original brass fixtures and a timber-boarded cloak room with drop-leaf counter.

Existing condition and repair

The main Gallery fabric needs attention and requires some significant repair/replacement of roofs and skylights. The current condition of roofs and glazing means there are ongoing problems with water ingress and associated damage to the building fabric, resulting in risk to the collection. The lack of thermal barriers and insulation in the roof space is also a major contributor to environmental problems.

The Cowdray Hall is in better condition but suffers from similar roof issues and water ingress at the basement makes this area unuseable. The Hall interior is in need of complete redecoration and new lighting and servicing systems are urgently required.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ART GALLERY

Following the original Art Gallery opening in 1885, in 1905 the building was extended in association with the newly established adjacent Gray's School of Art, linked to the Art Gallery across an elaborate gate building.

Further development took place with the addition of the City's War Memorial and the Cowdray Hall, opened by King George V and Queen Mary in 1926. In 1937 the 'Regional Museum' opened in the basement below the Cowdray Hall.

The James McBey Print Room and Art Library, within the Gallery, opened in 1961. The McBey Library within the building operates as a reference library.

The complex has undergone periodic alterations since, including addition of public toilets under the main stairs and the Cowdray Hall lobby, a staff wing over the service court in 1978, and internal fit outs including the shop and café.

PROPOSAL

The proposals can be summarised as follows;

External Fabric

- Removal of pitched roofs and skylights behind the parapets of the main building and the addition of a new storey of accommodation for temporary galleries and a learning zone, with external spaces at roof level;
- At the entrance portico, the enlargement of openings at ground floor, insertion of new glazed openings and doors with surrounds;
- At the west end of the main facade to Schoolhill, enlarge the openings to ground level;
- Demolition of the staff wing to the rear of the site and replacement with a new extension to provide staff facilities, library and resource centre (includes the demolition of the McBey and Murray Rooms);
- The addition of a new escape stair tower on the east elevation of the building into the courtyard of Robert Gordon's College; and
- Various repairs and sundry works to the exterior of the building.

New roof-top extension

The new rooftop extension would be contemporary in design and finish. It would be angular and have varying roof heights ranging from around 20.5m along the east and north elevations to 18.5m in height at the south-west corner, adjacent to the Memorial Dome. Along the western and southern elevations the structure is recessed back by around 6m to allow two new roof terraces to be formed. A large 'skylight' is proposed to allow light to filter down into the main Gallery to ground floor level. There are also two banks of rooflights along the taller sections of the extension.

In terms of materials, the 'solid' elements of the external walls would be finished with pre-patinated copper scalloped cladding panels, with copper coloured capping pieces. There would be a vertical window introduced in the north east corner facing into the Robert Gordon's College courtyard and along the south and western elevations, there would be a number of glazed sections which would have profile fins fitted externally to match the rest of the elevation.

New rear extension

The new rear extension would be between 19 and 21m in height (21m where the lift would be located internally) & 15m in width. This would reflect the form of the existing building. The extension would project towards the Robert Gordon's College building to within 4m of its south wall (apart from a new wall formed for the new covered delivery area). The walls would be finished with grey cladding panels, which have a variation in texture across the facade. There would be some thin ventilation panels introduced, as well as loading doors and a single-ply membrane roof, all of which would be grey in colour.

New escape stair extension

This would project 2m from the existing east facing wall, towards the courtyard of Robert Gordon's College. It would be 16m in height and 8m wide. There would be a precast concrete basecourse, this to the parapet level, the stairwell would have a glazed finish with profile fins attached to match the new roof extension. Above this the stairwell would match the roof extension, against which it would be read, in terms of materials.

Internal Fabric

Basement:

- reorganisation of the partitions to the basement gallery.

Ground floor:

- stripping-out of spaces, including the entrance lobby and staircase leading to the first floor; relocating granite columns disturbed by the downtakings into a new arrangement and reinstating the pilaster vaulting, refurbishment of the space, including modifying cills to windows;
- at the west end, stripping out finishes and steps relating to the former entrance to the Cowdray Hall and reorganising the layout;
- internal reorganisation to remove an education space, and reorder a shop and café;
- in the Sculpture Court, modifications at the north-west corner and to the north wall surfaces of the colonnade, to accommodate new principal stair - rising through three floors;
- narrowing in width of the 'middle north' gallery space, resulting from the the new stair;
- subdivision of the north west gallery to introduce 'goods' and passenger lifts;
- McBey Room to be stripped out and replaced by a new Community Gallery as part of the new wing to be erected to the rear of the building;
- 1960's War memorial panel to be repositioned within the 'War Memorial Court', the four doors of the court are to be reopened on their original axis;
- Cowdray Hall refurbished;
- External walls stripped back and relined with hydrocopic insulation.

First floor:

- Storage pods removed from the Murray Room and the space stripped out for the erection of the new rear wing;

- In the Memorial Court, the balcony widened and raised to improve access to the galleries on all four axes;
- Introduction of new stairwell into middle gallery, for vertical circulation;
- Laylight to the Sculpture Court removed and the decorative frieze laser scanned and taken down, stored and thereafter reinstated; the coffered ceiling surveyed and recorded and propped for the duration of the works;
- All remaining galleries; laylights and decorative plasterwork taken down, set aside and thereafter reinstated, to permit the construction of the new floor of accommodation;
- Circulation space at the head of the entrance staircase to become a gallery space after removal of existing stair;
- Upper surfaces and ceilings of the Cowdray Hall refurbished.

Second floor:

- Other than the ceilings and laylights of the galleries referred to above, none of the fabric of the building is affected at this level because of the construction of the new upper floor extension.

Supporting Documents

All drawings and the supporting documents listed below relating to this application can be viewed on the Council's website at - <http://planning.aberdeencity.gov.uk/PlanningDetail.asp?131246>

On accepting the disclaimer enter the application reference quoted on the first page of this report.

- Design Statement;
- Heritage Report and Conservation Statement;
- Lighting Concept; and
- Various photomontages.

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

The application has been referred to the the Planning Development Management Committee because more than 5 objections have been received. Accordingly, the application falls outwith the scope of the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

CONSULTATIONS

Roads Projects Team – no observations

Environmental Health – no observations

Enterprise, Planning & Infrastructure (Flooding) - no observations

Education, Culture & Sport (Archaeology) – no objections, but request a condition be attached requiring an archeological scheme of works be agreed prior to any works.

Historic Scotland – made initial comments requesting some additional information/justification but in general have been supportive of the scheme. Require formal notification of the application, given its A-Listing. A copy of their initial comments are appended to this report.

Community Council – no comments received

Aberdeen City and Shire Design Review Panel - Overall, the Panel were complimentary and supportive of the scheme. Comment was primarily focused on matters of clarification regarding the design development and form. The Panel supported the reorganisation of the internal layout and felt the proposals improved orientation and spatial clarity within the building. The Panel would welcome the proposal back once some of the details are confirmed with regard to the external area, materials, roof form and position. A copy of the comments are appended to this report.

REPRESENTATIONS

Seven letters of objection have been received. The objections raised relate to the following matters –

1. Loss of the staircase;
2. There would be adverse impact on the internal space due to the placing of the new staircase in what is currently the sculpture court;
3. The proposal is very damaging to the elevations on Schoolhill and from Robert Gordon's College;
4. The proposed rooftop extension would ruin the building and the surrounding area;
5. The proposed materials are wholly inappropriate;
6. The war memorial will be completely ruined due to the inappropriate rooftop extension;

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy and Guidance

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997

Section 64 of the 1997 Act imposes a duty on the planning authority to pay special attention to the definition of a conservation area as *'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve'*.

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) is the statement of Government policy on land use planning and includes the Government's core principles for the operation of the planning system and concise subject planning policies. The subject planning policies relating to the 'historic environment' is a relevant material consideration.

Historic Scotland's Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP) sets out policy for the management of change. Further guidance on selected topics is incorporated within a series of leaflets, 'Managing Change in the Historic Environment' – specifically 'Extensions' and 'Setting'.

New Design in Historic Settings suggests that new buildings in historic settings should seek to replicate existing buildings in design, appearance and materials. While this may be appropriate in specific circumstances, in general new interventions in historic settings do not need to look 'old' in order to create a harmonious relationship with their surroundings.

Aberdeen Local Development Plan

Policy C2 – City Centre Business Zone and Union Street

This policy primarily relates to retaining retail uses.

Policy H2 – Mixed Use Areas

Applications for development within Mixed Use Areas must take into account the existing uses and character of the surrounding area and avoid undue conflict with adjacent land uses and amenity.

Policy D1 – Architecture and Placemaking

To ensure high standards of design, new development must be designed with due consideration to its context and make a positive contribution to its setting.

Policy D4 – Aberdeen’s Granite Heritage

Promotes the retention of buildings of granite whether listed, or not. It reiterates the presumption against the demolition of granite buildings falling within conservation areas where the building preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the conservation area.

Policy D5 – Built Heritage

Reinforces the relevant statements within Scottish Planning Policy.

EVALUATION

Where a proposal affects a listed building Sections 14(2) and 59(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 places a duty on planning authorities, in determining an application for listed building consent, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. This is the primary consideration in the determination of applications for listed building consent.

Principle of development

The application site lies within a mixed use area within the ‘City Centre Business Zone’. As the application does not relate to a change of use, being an extension to an existing art gallery, there is no conflict with Policies C2 or H2 of the Local Development Plan. Further, with respect to the A-Listed granite building, the application does not propose significant demolition of the historically important or granite sections of the building and so there is conformity with Local Plan Policy D4.

The proposed works to the building is culture-led. The current building has seen a number of unsympathetic alterations over more recent years and is also considered by the applicants not to meet the current requirements or provide an adequate home for the important collection. Further, the War Memorial and Cowdray Hall are underused due to existing condition and access issues.

Notwithstanding the above, a more detailed evaluation is required to assess the proposals against other national and local policies and guidance.

Design, Scale and form of extensions

It is acknowledged that the new extensions contrast with the Renaissance style Art Gallery buildings, in terms of design and use of materials. However, this contemporary approach is clearly well considered and makes a positive contribution to the A-listed building in itself and to the wider Conservation Area. A detailed analysis of the approach taken is set out in the supporting 'Design Statement' and this is considered to align with the guidance set out in "New Design in Historic Settings", in that respect the proposed extensions are not considered to conflict with national policy. It is also considered that the proposed new extensions compliment the existing building and add a new modern dimension with a high design standard. It is clear to see how the building has evolved over its almost 130 year history and the new extensions would continue this.

Various options were considered by the architects, and these have been refined through contact with Planning Officers and Historic Scotland. It is acknowledged that the restricted site means that the only real option for creating more space is via a rooftop extension, however the detailed design of the rooftop extension is key to the success of the development. The symmetry of the original Gallery facade would be reinforced by the new rooftop extension and is similar in mass to the adjacent Robert Gordon's University administration building, which also faces onto the Schoolhill public space. The height of the rooftop extension would be kept below that of the Memorial Hall dome and when seen from Union Terrace Gardens, would form a back drop to the dome.

Consideration has been given to how the cladding materials will reflect the light of the sky and this is achieved by the use of scalloped (curved) pre-patinated copper panels with copper fins.

In terms of massing, this has been reduced through the reduction of the ridge level towards the south west corner, the introduction of glazed panels behind the copper fins, and the setting back of the extension on the front and west elevation resulting in the creation of terraces.

Robert Gordon's College quadrangle, while not a public space, provides a historic setting and a significant challenge lay in addressing how to mitigate the bulk of the rooftop extension from that vantage point. Although the extension would appear taller here, because of its position on the wallhead, this solution was considered the most appropriate in order to provide the required head height for the temporary gallery. It is considered that the choice of materials would help to soften the impact on this important section of the rear elevation.

In relation to the new rear extension, generally the size and scale are considered acceptable, in the context of its location which is almost obscured from wider public view other than the upper limit of the lift shaft, which may be visible from Belmont Street. The new Gallery support wing would be finished in grey cladding panels which fit in well with the granite of the gallery, although also providing a contrast, and the adjacent Robert Gordon's College building.

Notwithstanding its highly visible location adjacent to a well used access into the Robert Gordon's College quadrangle, the impact is likely to be minimal in the context of the overall redevelopment works. The structure is relatively small-scale, is positioned on the eastern elevation, and the materials proposed are considered to fit well with the existing building and new rooftop extension. It is noted that the new stairwell would have some impact on the width of the existing pedestrian footpath, which allows access from Schoolhill along the eastern side of the Art Gallery into the Robert Gordon's College quadrangle, although there would still be around a 2m wide footpath available for pedestrian use. The agent submitted an options appraisal with regards the new staircase which outlines that the location as proposed is the least obtrusive option available.

Lastly, with regards to the alterations to the Schoolhill elevation, this would involve the insertion of glazing in the entrance portico, creating two more glazed openings at the main entrance and opening up the windows towards the end of the 1925 extension, to create three access points into the café. The rationale behind these options is to: open up more of the building to improve its public presence; and to link in with future public realm works in front of the Gallery. Whilst there is no concern with the new openings at the main entrance, the detail of the three openings adjacent to the War Memorial are a clear compromise, resulting from the scale of the openings and operational issues which would be experienced with other practicable alternatives.

In terms of the contemporary design, it is worth reminding Members that the principle of such an approach, for a modern extension to an A-listed building, has been approved at the Triplekirks site on the southern side of Schoolhill. It is considered that the new extension to the Art Gallery would sit well in the context of that emerging example.

Visual impact of the development and impact on Listed Building and Conservation Area

Internal alterations

In terms of the War Memorial Court, the proposed alterations would open up the court, in order to improve permeability through it; and allow less restricted access to a first floor balcony. It is acknowledged that there are no practicable less obtrusive options which would allow a similar 'regeneration' of this space. In terms of the new section of balcony, the amended plans, which show the existing balcony being retained in-situ is to be welcomed.

In relation to the sculpture court, the opening up of the north-west corner, the repositioning of the front entrance columns and the new second floor balcony and atrium. It is considered that the special character of this key space would not be unduly harmed.

The proposed internal alterations to the original fabric are considered to be the most appropriate options considered, in order to open up the front range and making the entrance more welcoming and appealing. It is acknowledged that the existing staircase is not the original, but nonetheless is an important element and feature and its loss will have a marked impact on the building's special

architectural and historical interest. Nonetheless, there is clear justification for its removal, namely in order to facilitate the new openings either side of the existing door.

The new staircase within the north range would see the space narrowed to the same width as the other ranges. The removal of the storage pods within the Murray Room, on the first floor, is a positive step as it would facilitate bringing this room back into more productive use. The same can be said for the alterations to the ground and first floor galleries. Additionally, by relocating the education workshop into the new roof extension, the ground floor galleries can be more easily accessed and more gallery space made available.

External views

It is considered that the proposals would not be readily visible from the roundabout at Woolmanhill or further north on Skene Square.

The most significant long views are likely to be from around Union Terrace and the Gardens. The view from Union Terrace would still be dominated by the copper-clad dome of the Memorial Court and this will continue to break the skyline. The stepped and pitched profiles of the roof extension would add interest to the city's roofscape and, together with the angled planes of the walls to the principal south and west elevations, the physical bulk of the extension would be broken up satisfactorily. The changing roofline also creates an added dimension, rather than that which the constant roofline of a standard 'box' might have provided.

The careful choice of external finishing materials to the roof would create visual interest, with the leading edges highlighted against the scalloped surfaces of the panels. It is also considered that the colour would relate well to the pink granite, used decoratively in the facades of the building.

The other key long view within the townscape is from Union Street, down Belmont Street. The changing planes of the rooftop extension add to the interest of this vista. Viewed from this angle the necessary bulk of the extension does not seem out of place as it is framed by the tall lead clad dome on the corner of Belmont Street. The proposal to open up the panels to either side of the entrance ensures that the plinth of the building becomes less solid and more welcoming.

Short Views

Short distance views within the historic setting are of no less importance in establishing the relationship between the extended and refurbished Art Gallery and the adjoining buildings and public spaces.

The impact on the two views from the southwest, from the Denburn Bridge and in front of the Triple Kirks site respectively, have in part been considered above. There is clear benefit in tying in the advanced points of the rooftop extension with the original 1884 façade, as the design acknowledges the symmetry, but without replicating it. Additionally, the sloping eaves line to the rooftop extension, at the southeast corner, defies true perspective and would add to the interest of the skyline.

The view in the reverse direction, from Schoolhill, shows the degree to which the public realm to the front of the Art Gallery has the potential to transform the streetscape. The harmonisation of the colours of the rooftop extension with the tints of the granite dressings are an important aspect in the successful integration of the new and the old work.

Benefits of the development

In terms of the alterations proposed within the front range, the benefits that would be realised include making the entrance more accessible. By removing the stair and reorganising the café, shop and ancillary functions away from the original gallery, the space becomes more open and welcoming, creating better visual connections and makes access easier. Having the café situated adjacent to the War Memorial and Cowdray Hall allows for this part of the Gallery to be open in the evenings and reflects the function of that part of the building and to events being held there.

Relevant planning matters raised in written representations

1. This point has been addressed above.
2. The new staircase is to be placed within the north range, not the sculpture court. It is acknowledged that in the north range there would be a small reduction of useable space however it is considered that this is more than compensated for by the other alterations which creates more gallery space throughout the building.
3. – 6. These points have been addressed in the relevant sections above.

RECOMMENDATION

Willingness to approve subject to conditions and refer application to Historic Scotland

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

Taking account of the points above, it is considered that the modern design of the extensions would comply with Aberdeen Local Development Plan Policy D1 (Architecture and Placemaking). The proposed extensions are considered to make a positive contribution to the immediate area and fit well in the context of the building in terms of size, scale, form, massing and use of materials – all of which are considered to compliment and enhance the existing building. Further, it is considered that the proposed extensions comply with the objectives of 'New Design in Historic Settings' with regards to the contemporary extensions fitting harmoniously with the historic environment. It is considered that the proposals are a creative response to the existing A-Listed building which preserve the existing built heritage.

In terms of impact on the A-listed building and the wider conservation area, it is considered that the new development would preserve and enhance the building, in line with the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended by the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2011, Historic Scotland's Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP), Scottish Planning Policy statements on the historic environment, and Aberdeen Local Development Plan policy D5 (Built Heritage).

The proposal seeks the retention of the existing granite building and therefore complies with Aberdeen Local Development Plan Policy D4 (Aberdeen's Granite Heritage).

By virtue that the development is not proposing the loss of a retail unit, there is no conflict with Aberdeen Local Development Plan Policy C2 (City Centre Business Zone and Union Street). Further, it is considered that the extension to the Art Gallery would not have any undue conflict with the adjacent land uses nor levels of amenity and therefore there is no conflict with Aberdeen Local Development Plan Policy H2 (Mixed Use Areas).

it is recommended that approval is granted with the following condition(s):

1. Prior to commencement of the following works, a finalised specification, including, where appropriate, larger scale elevation and section drawings, brochure details and samples, shall be submitted to and approved by the planning authority, in consultation with Historic Scotland:

Full details of the repair and restoration works to the Art Gallery buildings (internal and external) including: details of protective measures for the interior and exterior fabric and features that are to remain in situ during the works; lime mortar specification for repointing of external walls, including a methodology for removal of existing pointing to avoid damage to stonework; mortar mix; protective measures for carbonation stage; details of window and door repairs and repainting, including proposed colour; details of the internal wall, floor and ceiling treatment and finishing, including within the Cowdray Hall and War Memorial Court (inclusive of details of the new memorial panels and new hanging art work/light display); and proposed treatment for retained special architectural features, including decorative frieze on first floor (to include details of storage and repositioning);

Reason: To safeguard the building's special architectural and historic interest.

2. Prior to commencement of the following works, a finalised specification, including, where appropriate, larger scale elevation and section drawings, brochure details and samples, shall be submitted to and approved by the planning authority, in consultation with Historic Scotland:

Full details of any alteration/new works (internal and external) including: 1:20 scale section drawings and plans for the roof terrace and glazed balustrades; Details of any new signage, external lighting, and other new fixtures to be attached to the exterior walls of the building, to include non-ferrous fixings into masonry joints; Larger scale elevation and section drawings for new opening for staircase within north west corner of the Sculpture Court; External stone repair, including details of stone replacement, and samples;

Reason: To safeguard the building's special architectural and historic interest.

3. that no development shall take place within the application site until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work which shall include post-excavation and publication work in accordance

with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by Aberdeen City Council as Planning Authority - in the interests of protecting items of historical importance as may exist within the application site.

4. that no development shall take place unless samples of all external finishing materials (including a coloured sample of the copper capping piece for the roof addition) of the development hereby approved has been submitted to, and approved in writing by by Aberdeen City Council as Planning Authority and thereafter the development shall be carried out in accordance with the details so agreed - in the interests of visual amenity.

Dr Margaret Bochel

Head of Planning and Sustainable Development.