



Longmore House
Salisbury Place
Edinburgh
EH9 1SH

Direct Line: 0131 668 8913
Direct Fax: 0131 668 8722
Switchboard: 0131 668 8600
Michael.Scott@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Our ref: HGG/A/GA/71
Our Case ID: 201303346
Your ref: P131246

By E-mail

Planning & Sustainable Development Enterprise,
Planning & Infrastructure
Aberdeen City Council
Business Hub 4, Ground Floor North
Marischal College
Broad Street
Aberdeen
AB10 1AB
tomhart@aberdeencity.gov.uk

30 September 2013

Dear Sirs

**Planning (Listed Buildings And Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997
Aberdeen Art Gallery Schoolhill Aberdeen**

We refer to your consultation of 29 August and have now completed our consideration of this. Our comments are as follows:

The application relates to a proposed major intervention and expansion scheme for the category A listed Aberdeen Art Gallery. It stems from Aberdeen City Council's commitment to a major project to transform the gallery complex into a world class cultural centre.

Designed in three main phases by one of Aberdeen's pre-eminent architectural practices, Alexander Marshall Mackenzie and sons, the gallery is one of the principal civic buildings from Aberdeen's late 19th century planned urbanisation. It comprises the original 1885 Renaissance style block in distinctive grey granite ashlar and pink granite dressings, and which includes the former Gray's School of Art building and Robert Gordon's College Arch to the east, forming a continuous principal elevation on Schoolhill, set behind a small triangular area of public open space; the 1905 rear expansion, including atrium-like colonnaded Sculpture Court and re-modelled front entrance area with new marble stair; and the 1925 extension to the west, comprising Cowdray Hall and copper domed War Memorial Court, creating a fine neo-classical corner.

Our position

We have welcomed the opportunity at pre-application stage to discuss the emerging proposals. This has enabled us to fully appreciate the numerous deficiencies of the current gallery, notably the deteriorating building fabric and environmental conditions; inadequacy of space; and poor accessibility, circulation, visitor and support facilities. We support the need to tackle these deficiencies and recognise the wider community benefits from transforming the Art Gallery into a first class cultural centre. We have acknowledged that this requires extensive intervention and expansion. We have also





recognised that a roof addition, in the absence of other options, is the only practical way to achieve the required additional space, and that considerable change to the interior is necessary. We have however had reservations relating to (1) the height and appearance of the roof addition, including fire escape extension (2) the removal of the main stair; (3) reconfiguration of the War Memorial Court balcony; and (4) alterations to the main (Schoolhill) elevation.

With regard to this submitted application scheme, we are now generally satisfied with the proposals. We consider that a clear rationale for the scheme is provided with the supporting information (Heritage Report, Conservation Statement, and Design Statement) in terms of the extent of intervention required to tackle the building deficiencies and to sufficiently revitalize the gallery. The supporting information also addresses the proposals in relation to relevant national listed building policy set out in the Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP), notably paragraph 3.43 covering works of major intervention. While we still have some reservations about certain parts of the scheme, as mentioned below, we are content that the special architectural and historic interest of the Art Gallery would be largely maintained.

Our comments on the associated application for planning permission P131247, including potential impact on the setting of other nearby category A listed buildings, are set out in our accompanying consultation reply letter for this planning application.

Our specific comments on this application for listed building consent are as follows:

Exterior works

- *Roof addition and roof terraces*

This would clearly be a substantial contemporary addition positioned above the main gallery space, impacting on the wider townscape as well as affecting the character of the Art Gallery itself. Our comments on the impact on the wider townscape setting, including Robert Gordon's College quadrangle, are provided in our accompanying consultation reply letter for the planning application P131247.

With the exception of its rear view, we are content that the roof addition would sit as comfortably as can be in relation to the existing Art Gallery and would not overwhelm or unduly harm its special character. This is due to its overall height; proposed materials and detailing; alignment with the original 1885 Schoolhill façade; its largely setback position from this façade and the War Memorial corner elevation, including its copper dome.

Concerning the rear view from Robert Gordon's quadrangle, the roof addition would clearly have a dominating visual impact on the Art Gallery due to its bulk and positioning hard onto the back building line. While there appears to be no scope to reduce its size further or set it back from the rear building line, we would welcome further review of the proposed external finishing treatment to help soften its visual impact.

With regard to the proposed roof terraces, these should not impact significantly on the appearance of the listed building. We would however like to see further information on the proposed glazed balustrades, including larger scale section and plan drawings showing the balustrades in relation to the Schoolhill front elevation parapet and the west part of the roof adjoining the dome. This information should



be sufficient to show that the visual impact of the balustrades is minimised as much as possible.

- *Fire escape extension*

We consider that this would have an adverse visual impact on the Art Gallery, notably detracting from the views of the Robert Gordon's Arch. We understand that less intrusive options, including an internal solution, or a smaller/repositioned extension, are not available. However this is not made clear in the submitted Design Statement and Heritage Report. We recommend that clarification of this be obtained, which clearly demonstrates that there are no other options for a less intrusive solution and that the wider public benefits of a revitalized gallery cannot be achieved without this intervention. Subject to this clarification, we would welcome further refinement of the current proposal, including its overall size and review of its cladding treatment, to help minimise its visual impact.

- *Rear extension*

We are generally satisfied with the proposed extension at the rear to include new staff facilities and library/resource centre. This would replace the rear part of the 1925 extension and a 1978 staff block in the rear courtyard area. Subject to clarification of its finishing metal cladding material and colour, we are content that this would not adversely affect the Art Gallery.

- *Alterations to Schoolhill elevation*

The proposed external alterations for the Schoolhill elevation would involve insertion of additional glazing in the entrance portico and glazed doors at the 1925 west end. We acknowledge the rationale to open up more of the building to improve its public presence and to link in with a future phase of public realm improvements for the front of the gallery. While we are content with this rationale, we suggest that options be further explored, for less intervention on this façade, to retain more of the pink granite basecourse, if practicable, by reducing the number of new doorways.

Interior works

- *General*

We accept that major alterations to the interior are required to significantly revitalize the gallery. We are generally content with the overall rationalization and alterations proposed.

- *Removal of main stair*

While the existing 1905 marble stair is an important feature and its loss would have an adverse impact on the building's special architectural and historic interest, we accept there is clear justification shown for its removal, as set out in the supporting information

- *Alterations to War Memorial Court*

The proposed widening and raised height for the balcony within the 1925 War Memorial Court would disturb a well preserved key interior feature. In the absence of less intrusive options, we accept the rationale for its reconfiguration to allow



level-access circulation through the first floor suite of galleries and to increase its use for art display space and possibly as an antechamber for the Cowdray Hall. We consider that the proposed contemporary design including simple glazed balustrade would be an honest solution. We would however prefer to see the existing balustrade retained in-situ, along with the remainder of the existing balcony as shown on the section drawing. Although this would be concealed behind the new work, it would make it easier for any future reinstatement of the original balcony. We recommend that the proposals be amended accordingly and would also like to see details of the finalised proposals for the Memorial Court, including details for the new memorial panel, and new hanging art work/light display. Subject to this, we are satisfied that the overall special character of the court would be mostly maintained.

- *Sculpture Court*

Concerning proposals affecting the Sculpture Court, these mainly relate to the new opening in the NW corner where the new stair would be inserted, the repositioning of associated front entrance columns, and the impact of the new second floor balcony and atrium. We are content that the special character of this key space would not be unduly harmed, but would welcome further clarification, including larger scale drawings, for the new stair access opening.

Miscellaneous matters

It would be desirable to include a copy of the engineer's report, specification and drawings, with the application. This should be sufficient to show that the existing building is structurally capable of such an extensive intervention without greater alteration than shown in the current submitted details.

We would also like to see a full specification for the proposed repairs and restoration work, including stonework, lime mortar work, roof repairs, rainwater goods, windows and doors (including details of original paint colour reinstatement), and interior works, including measures for safeguarding historic fabric and features during the refurbishment and construction works.

We also wish to remind the applicants of the need to provide the RCAHMS with an opportunity to record the building prior to commencement of works.

LBC application procedure

As the City Council is the applicant in this instance, the application for listed building consent will require statutory referral to Historic Scotland for its determination on behalf of Scottish Ministers.

We would be happy to discuss the proposals further, in the light of our above comments and any further details and amendments being submitted.

Yours faithfully

Michael Scott

Senior Heritage Management Officer, Historic Buildings North

Aberdeen City and Shire Design Review Panel

Report

Project: Aberdeen Art Gallery Redevelopment

Date of Meeting: 15 April 2013

Details: Internal refurbishment and extension of existing category A listed Gallery, Cowdray Hall and War Memorial complex.

Location: Schoolhill, Aberdeen, AB10 1FQ

Use: Arts and Culture

Planning Authority: Aberdeen City Council

Presenters: Gareth Hoskins (Managing Director & Architect) Christine Rew (Art Gallery and Museums Manager)

Panel members: John Buchan, David McClean, Susan Mcfadzean, Andrew McNair, Sholto Humphries

Chair: Dr Margaret Bochel

Scribe: Rebecca Oakes

Present: Laura Robertson, Tommy Hart, Daniel Lewis, Bridget Turnbull

Introduction

The Aberdeen Art Gallery is located within the city centre of Aberdeen and is currently undertaking a redevelopment project. The redevelopment aims to transform Aberdeen Art Gallery and Cowdray Hall into a world class cultural centre, celebrating art and music in the North-east, and provide a focal point for the creative industries and Aberdeen's Cultural Quarter. The project will restore and modernise the buildings, celebrate and bring to life Aberdeen Art Gallery's internationally significant permanent collections, expand the temporary displays and special exhibition galleries, enhance the visitor experience and allow the gallery to reach out to new audiences. The redevelopment project will also seek to bring a renewed understanding of the third building within the complex – the War Memorial – which offers a treasured place for contemplation and reflection and continues to be the focus of the annual civic Act of Remembrance.

Panel's Views and comments

Adjacent building

The question was raised by the Panel as to why the adjacent Robert Gordon University building to the east of the courtyard archway was not considered during the design of redevelopment proposals for the Aberdeen Art Gallery. The building in question had an extra floor within its layout with good height as it was previously occupied by Gray's School of Art. It was confirmed by the presenters that this building was indeed explored as an option however it did not meet the Gallery requirements for redevelopment or help to overcome some of the

problems with the existing gallery space. Using this building would create an additional entrance door to the gallery complex which would not solve the circulation issues and crucially the building is not for sale. However, the Panel did feel that the potential public space improvements outside the gallery will help to unify these two building elevations and offer an enhanced setting.

Frontage

The Panel asked for clarification regarding the proposed changes to the Gallery frontage and how this would work to connect with the proposed internal spaces. The presenting team confirmed that there would be two 'slot' windows created either side of the main entrance door, up to the height of the existing windows. This desire to 'open up' the entrance for visitors was in response to public consultation feedback whereby the existing entrance appeared uninviting. The design team discussed how they looked at various options for the entrance, including coming through behind the War Memorial lion statue, but the entrance at the top of Belmont Street was considered preferable for both prominence and to aid delivery of the internal circulation strategy. To further aid the 'opening up' of the main gallery frontage, the café is to be relocated to the western end and the three windows along this elevation extended by lowering their sills and allowing the café to spill out onto the public space. This would enable the café space to double up for evening events at the Cowdray Hall and avoid the security implications of opening up the entire Gallery building.

Public Space

The Panel was supportive of the potential to create a public space to the front of the art gallery with an enhanced public realm; however they were concerned about delivery and the impact this could have on the overall redevelopment. The Panel added that due to the level differences and the presence of the road this creates a barrier to public usage of the 'pocket park'. The presenting team confirmed that they had begun discussions with both Robert Gordon's College and the Council regarding the proposals, including how it can plug into wider public realm improvements in the City Centre. The public realm scheme outside the Gallery will remain a part of the proposed redevelopment; however the timescales for delivery will alter to reflect partnership working with relevant landowners and stakeholders. The design intention is to open up the 'pocket park' into a usable area of public realm and take it back to the concept of a civic space in which it was originally envisaged. The Panel suggested that this could include the tightening up of the Schoolhill / Blackfriars Street junction and offering a more gradual pavement incline up to the main entrance door. The presenting team welcomed these suggestions and added that the Gallery could explore opportunities to expand art exhibitions into this public space.

Rooftop Extension and Form

The Panel asked a number of questions concerning the form and position of the rooftop extension, including in relation to the existing façade of the building and clarification regarding rooftop access. The presenting team confirmed that the

proposals had undergone a series of design options, one of which was primarily rectangular in form with a glazed frontage all along the principle elevation, which was discussed as potentially being built directly off or behind the granite parapet. Another option brought the front elevation of the extension in line with the existing façade extending the parapet. Any extension must have a certain internal height to function as gallery space, but the design team wanted to create an extension with interest to avoid appearing overly dominant. Therefore the final option chosen by the design team consisted of an extension set behind the parapet and in certain areas 'pulled back' to offer external rooftop spaces.

This design evolved with a series of angles and slopes, primarily around the War Memorial dome, this enabled the majority of the higher space to be kept to the rear and for the extension to effectively 'wrap around' the roofspace. The resulting extension creates a series of both long and short distance views and glimpses which change as you move around the building, and provides the opportunity for creating an active balcony roof space.

Materials

The presenting team mentioned a number of material choices for the rooftop extension had been considered. The early design options showed glass, however this material choice is in the process of being reconsidered as the design team felt that it appeared to 'hover' on the top of the building. Art gallery spaces require to be more contained with the ability to control light levels, therefore a darker more solid material form is now being considered which actually engages more with the building. The Panel showed support for such a change in material form but did raise concerns regarding how the proposed material would weather and potential staining of the granite façade, particularly where the two materials meet at the granite wall head/parapet. The design team confirmed this as a key concern for any material choice and a supportive drainage strategy along with product testing would help to confirm final material choice.

Conclusion

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.

This report reflects the views of the panel as a whole and is not attributed to any one individual. The comments within this report do not prejudice any panel members from forming a differing view individually at a later date.

