

# Planning Development Management Committee

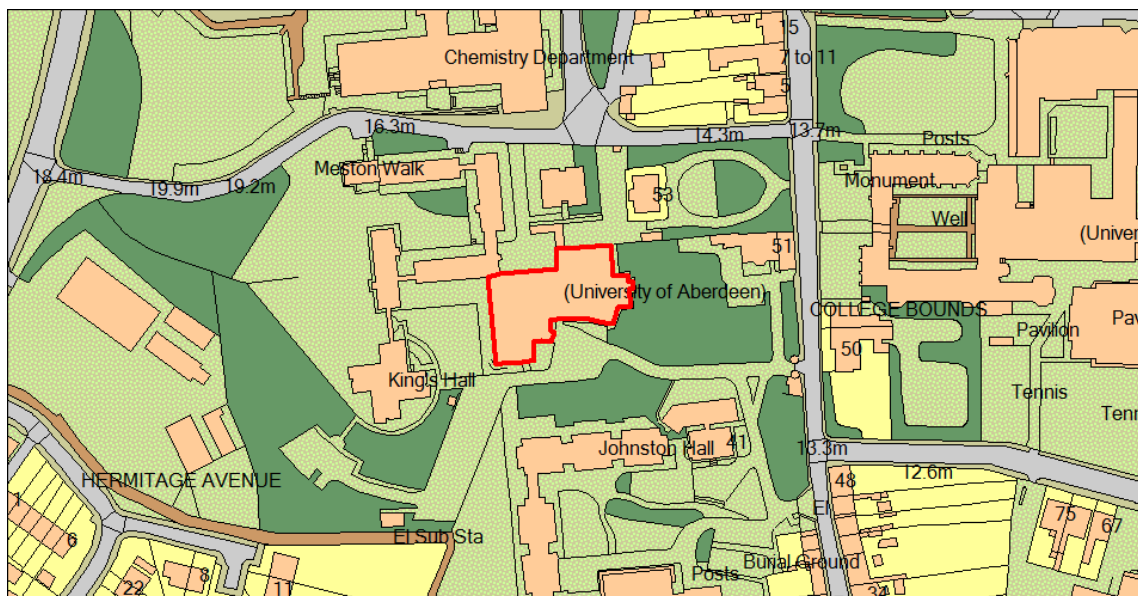
CROMBIE HALLS, COLLEGE BOUNDS,  
ABERDEEN

RETROSPECTIVE APPLICATION FOR  
INTERNAL ALTERATIONS THAT FORM AN  
ACCESS CORRIDOR WITHIN RESTAURANT

For: University of Aberdeen

Application Type : Listed Building Consent  
Application Ref. : P150392  
Application Date: 16/03/2015  
Officer: Alex Ferguson  
Ward : Tillydrone/Seaton/Old Aberdeen (J  
Noble/R Milne/R Grant)

Advert : Listed Building  
Advertised on: 25/03/2015  
Committee Date: 17/09/2015  
Community Council : Comments



## RECOMMENDATION:

**Willingness to approve subject to referral to Historic Scotland**

## **DESCRIPTION**

Crombie Halls lie within the grounds of the University of Aberdeen. This proposal relates to part of that wider complex, specifically the large semi open-plan Refectory and Hall rooms at the eastern end of the building's ground floor. Crombie Halls are surrounded by other University related buildings.

A Category 'A' listed building and lies within the Old Aberdeen Conservation Area. The Historic Scotland listing notes that Crombie Halls are an excellent and almost unaltered example of the early post-war private practice work of Sir Robert Matthew and among the very best 1950's Modern Movement buildings in Scotland. It was designed between 1953-56 and built during 1957-60.

## **RELEVANT HISTORY**

**P140681** – Listed Building Consent was approved conditionally in October 2014 for the 'Installation of replacement signage and refurbishment of café' at Crombie Halls. The application was recommended for approval by the Planning Committee and Historic Scotland agreed to that recommendation.

**P140682** – Advertisement Consent was granted in December 2014 for the installation of the exterior signage, approved in association to the above listed building consent.

## **PROPOSAL**

Listed building consent is retrospectively sought for the installation of a partly glazed partition wall (incorporating double doors) that runs on an east/west axis, forming a corridor at the southern end of the former Hall, as well as for the erection of a diagonal timber screen in the north-western corner of the Refectory room.

The part-glazed partition wall consists of 1.17m high timber panelling below 2.13m high panels of glazing (total height of 3.3m). This partition wall has three sections, separated by two original structural pillars. The central section incorporates a set of predominantly glazed double doors, which provide access into the self-contained restaurant, with the corridor leading to the Refectory, which is soon to be part-used as a café. Alterations to facilitate the development of the café were recently approved - listed building consent and advertisement consent applications P140681 and P140682.

The timber-panelled partition screen in the corner of the Refectory has been installed in order to create a service access to the restaurant from the kitchen, which is situated to the north of the Refectory. This 2m high screen comprises vertical timber linings, finished to match the existing walls of the Refectory.

## 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?ref=150392>

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

## REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

The application has been referred to the Planning Development Management Committee because the Old Aberdeen Community Council have objected. Accordingly, the application falls outwith the scope of the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

## CONSULTATIONS

**Roads Development Management** – No observations

**Environmental Health** – No observations

**Communities, Housing and Infrastructure (Flooding)** - No observations

**Historic Scotland** – Alterations required to facilitate the current café and restaurant uses should be carefully designed to preserve the openness of the hall, which is an important feature of Robert Matthew's Scandinavian-style design. The insertion of partition walls and the sub-division of the hall should be avoided as much as possible and options should be explored for removing the partitions. Potential solutions could include the use of low-height movable screens.

If, however, the applicant wishes to retain the existing partition wall, clear evidence will need to be provided to demonstrate why less intrusive options cannot suffice, in accordance with SHEP Paragraph 3.43.

**Community Council** – The Old Aberdeen Community Council object to the retrospective works for the following reasons:

- The alterations destroy the architect's spatial concept for the internal layout;
- The materials and décor used are not in keeping with the original design;
- The work has been carried out without proper consultation or design procedures being implemented; and
- The works have been carried out without first obtaining listed building consent.

## **REPRESENTATIONS**

5 letters of objection have been received, issues raised can be summarised as follows –

- The unauthorised changes damage the special character of the listed building and take away the spaciousness that was an integral part of the original design;
- The symmetry of Robert Matthew's original design has been lost and his concept of a light, expansive Hall/ Refectory disregarded;

## **PLANNING POLICY**

### **National Policy and Guidance**

#### 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 policies relating to the 'historic environment' are a relevant material consideration.

It is made clear that the planning system should enable positive change in the historic environment, informed by a clear understanding of the importance of the heritage assets affected and to ensure their future use. Change should be sensitively managed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the fabric and setting of the asset, and ensure that its special characteristics are protected, conserved or enhanced.

#### Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP)

Notes that the historic environment has been adapted over time to meet changing needs, and that our view of what is important develops and changes. New buildings, sites and environments are created, and over time, become historic. The challenge for sustainable management of the historic environment and how it contributes to the vitality of modern life, is to identify its key characteristics and to establish the boundaries within which change can continue so that it enhances rather than diminishes historic character.

Scottish Ministers want to broaden access to the historic environment and break down intellectual, physical and economic barriers.

The following paragraphs set out considerations in assessing proposals for alterations to listed buildings:

- Paragraph 3.35 - The majority of listed buildings are adaptable and have met the needs of successive generations while retaining their character. Change should therefore be managed to protect a building's special interest while enabling it to remain in active use. Each case must be judged on its own merits but in general terms listing rarely prevents

adaptation to modern requirements but ensures that work is done in a sensitive and informed manner.

- Paragraph 3.43 – In general the more extensive the intervention which is proposed, the more supporting information applications should provide. Where proposals involve significant intervention, evidence that less intrusive options have been considered should be provided. Where the application would have a significantly adverse effect on the building's special interest, but is believed to offer significant benefits to economic growth or the wider community, applicants should prepare a statement which justifies the intervention in relation to these benefits. This statement should demonstrate that the benefits could not be realised without the intervention proposed.

Further guidance on selected topics is incorporated within a series of leaflets, 'Managing Change in the Historic Environment'. The following is considered particularly relevant:

#### Historic Scotland – Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Interiors

- Where the original plan form (or a later plan form of special interest) survives, this should normally be retained without subdivision or amalgamation of spaces, and all major works of alteration restricted to areas of secondary importance. The entrance hall, main stair and principal apartments, especially where these are publicly accessible or lie to the front of the building and can be seen through windows from the street outside, should not be subdivided or opened up.
- Alterations to historic interiors must be considered in the context of the type and quality of the existing interior. High-quality contemporary design can enhance and complement the significance of a historic interior, but it should be subordinate to, and respect, earlier spaces or features of interest.
- Where alterations are essential, the objective should be to allow future reinstatement of original features or finishes.

### **Aberdeen Local Development Plan**

#### D5 (Built Heritage)

Proposals affecting Listed Buildings will only be permitted if they comply with Scottish Planning Policy.

### **Proposed Aberdeen Local Development Plan**

The following policies of the proposed ALDP substantively reiterate those of the current Local Development Plan:

- D4 – Historic Environment (*D5 – Built Heritage*)

## 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 the retrospective works

Crombie Hall received Category 'A' listed status in 2004 and is noted in the Historic Scotland list description as an excellent and almost unaltered example of the early post-war private practice work of Sir Robert Matthew and among the very best 1950's Modern Movement buildings in Scotland.

The large, spacious ground floor inter-linked Refectory and Hall rooms are a significant feature of Robert Matthew's Scandinavian-influenced design for the building, with a strong emphasis placed on the importance of the openness of the ground floor rooms and the large amount of natural light that they receive.

It is recognised that the works subject to this application have some detrimental impact on the original plan form of the ground floor. The works are therefore considered to have a mild adverse impact on the special character of the listed building.

However, whilst it is acknowledged that the partition wall and screen would disrupt the original plan form, Paragraphs 3.35 and 3.43 of the SHEP are supportive of alterations to listed buildings where they enable a building to remain in active use, are done in a sensitive and informed manner and where sufficient justification is provided to demonstrate that the alterations would offer significant benefits to economic growth or the wider community.

### Design and reversibility

The partition wall has been carefully designed and sited to ensure that it has minimal impact on the original fabric of the building. The timber-lined and part-glazed wall reflects the design of the original décor and still allows a significant amount of daylight to reach the restaurant, originally from the glazing on the building's southern elevation. The partition wall also follows a natural alignment with the original structural pillars, forming the corridor between the double doors at each end of the southern side of the Hall. The Historic Scotland list description for Crombie Halls makes reference to the 'distinctive rounded corners to inner edges of glazed timber door frames'. The central double doors of the partition wall have been designed to reflect this characteristic and the partition wall and doors are therefore considered to be respectful of and sympathetic to the design and finish of the Hall's original interior.

The timber-lined screen in the Refectory is of limited height considering its purpose and although it obscures views of the original double doors in this corner of the space, it is visually subservient to the original North/South dividing partition wall and fanlights and is finished with timber linings, varnished to match the original walls of the Refectory.

It is also important to note that all of the works that have been carried out have not resulted in the loss or alteration of any original fabric, have been sensitively attached to existing walls and are easily reversible, in accordance with Historic Scotland's Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Interiors guidance note.

#### Justification of the works

Following consultation with Historic Scotland, the applicant was requested to submit justification for the works. The applicant did so on 8 July 2015 and the Council's Conservation Officer was satisfied with the justification presented for the installation of the part-glazed partition wall in the original Hall room. However, further explanation in relation to the screen within the Refectory was requested.

The original justification set out that the applicant felt that the two spaces would operate more effectively if the previous uses of the Refectory and Hall were reversed, with the larger space occupied by the café, which would offer a catering facility for the residents of Crombie Halls and the adjacent Johnston Halls.

In the justification statement, the applicant outlined the necessity for the 'Bishop's Table' restaurant in the former Hall to be closed off and secure at times when the café remains accessible to students, thus ruling out movable partition screens. They also noted that the former Hall is a more intimate space with daylight provided by rooflights in the centre of the room and unlike the Refectory, there is only a limited view out across the corridor.

In a further justification statement submitted on 24 July 2015, additional information was provided outlining the necessity of the timber screen in the north-western corner of the Refectory. It was stated that the creation of an alternative service access from the kitchen to the restaurant was not deemed feasible and was discounted due to the existing services within the corridor which prevent the location of a necessary dividing partition across the corridor.

The chosen route for providing service access to the restaurant uses original door openings and was considered to have minimal intervention to the original building with no loss of, or alteration to original fabric. The height of the screen was also seen as being minimal, similar in height to the screens approved as part of P140681, and maintains the visual dominance and integrity to the original main partition wall and glazed fanlight. The diagonal angle of the screen is also noted to reflect the diagonal wall in the opposite, south-eastern corner of the Refectory.

The justification provided for the installation of the part-glazed partition wall in the Hall and the timber screen in the Refectory is considered by the Council's

Conservation Officer to be acceptable and in accordance with the requirements of Paragraphs 3.35 and 3.43 of SHEP, as the alterations would enable the building to remain in active, viable use without having a significantly detrimental impact on the special character of the building.

#### Points raised in letters of objection

The points raised in the letters of objection and the objection from the Old Aberdeen Community Council have been addressed in the foregoing evaluation.

#### Proposed Aberdeen Local Development Plan

The Proposed ALDP was approved at the meeting of the Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee of 28 October 2014. It constitutes the Council's settled view as to what should be the content of the final adopted ALDP and is now a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, along with the adopted ALDP. The exact weight to be given to matters contained in the Proposed ALDP (including individual policies) in relation to specific applications will depend on whether:

- these matters have been subject to public consultation through the Main Issues Report; and
- the level of objection raised in relation these matters as part of the Main Issues Report; and
- the relevance of these matters to the application under consideration

The foregoing can only be assessed on a case by case basis. In relation to this particular application, Policy D4 (Historic Environment) substantively reiterates the relevant corresponding Policy D5 (Built Heritage) of the current Local Plan. The proposed works are therefore considered to comply with both Plans for the foregoing reasons.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**Willingness to approve subject to referral to Historic Scotland**

## **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

It is acknowledged that the retrospective internal alterations have a mild adverse impact on the original plan form and therefore the special character of the listed building. However, it is considered that their requirement has been satisfactorily justified in accordance with paragraphs 3.35 and 3.43 of SHEP. The retrospective works have also been sympathetically designed to match the original interior and are therefore are considered to comply with the fundamental principles of SPP and SHEP, as well as Historic Scotland's 'Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Interiors' guidance note and Policy D5 (Built Heritage) of the Aberdeen Local Development Plan. The proposed works are also considered to comply with the relevant corresponding policies of the proposed ALDP.