



Alex Ferguson
Planning Officer
Aberdeen City Council
Marischal College
Broad Street
Aberdeen
AB10 1AB

20 April 2015

Dear Alex Ferguson

Planning application reference:

Site: Crombie Hall Of Residence, College Bounds, Old Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB24 3TS

Proposal: Retrospective application for internal alterations that form an access corridor within restaurant

Our ref: 14 07 18

The Twentieth Century Society has been made aware of the above retrospective application for alterations to the Category A listed Crombie Hall. The Society objects to this application, which we believe causes significant harm to a designated Heritage Asset. The Society is disappointed that the applicant has not explored the significance of the site or the impact of this intervention on the heritage asset in conservation terms. The understanding of significance is critical to undertaking works that are sympathetic to listed buildings and should be regarded as vital in a Category A listed building of this type.

Designed in 1953-6 by Sir Robert Matthew, this modern movement building was listed at Category A by Historic Scotland in 2004 underlining its national importance as a heritage asset. The list description says of the building that it is: "an excellent and almost unaltered example of the early post-war private practice work of Robert Matthew" and that it is "among the very best 1950s Modern Movement buildings in Scotland". The design of this building is linked to the 1950s trend for simple Scandinavian influenced construction: this design idiom is particularly featured in the refectory area. The importance of the light and the openness of this area cannot be underestimated as it forms the essence of the ethos behind the design of the era. This application seems to be for ostensibly minor works: but the impact on this important space is far from minor, as it changes the character of the space completely and thus does significant harm to the listed building. An assessment of the

relative significance of the areas within the building and their vulnerability to change would have highlighted the problem with this design at an early stage before the damage was done.

The Society would therefore urge Aberdeen City Council to resist the proposals by refusing this application. The applicants should be prevailed upon to reassess their treatment of this heritage asset by removing the completed alterations and considering an alternative approach sympathetic to the listed building. Failing this we call upon Aberdeen City Council to take appropriate action to ensure removal of these alterations. The Society is dismayed to have to commend once again the employment of a conservation led approach to works to this Category A listed building.

I hope these comments are useful to you in your deliberations regarding this case, I would be extremely grateful if the Society could be informed of the Council's decision.

Yours sincerely

Clare Price

Conservation Adviser
The Twentieth Century Society
70 Cowcross Street
London EC1M 6EJ

Remit: The Twentieth Century Society was founded in 1979 and is the national amenity society concerned with the protection, appreciation, and study of post-1914 architecture, townscape and design. The Society is acknowledged in national planning guidance as the key organisation concerned with the modern period and is a constituent member of the Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies. Under the procedures set out in *ODPM Circular 09/2005*, all English local planning authorities must inform the Twentieth Century Society when an application for listed building consent involving partial or total demolition is received, and they must notify us of the decisions taken on these applications.

P&SD Letters of Representation		
Application Number: 150392		
RECEIVED 21 APR 2015		
Nor <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sou <input type="checkbox"/>	MAD <input type="checkbox"/>
Case Officer: Initials		ALF
Date Acknowledged		22/04/2015

150392



Mr A Ferguson
Planning Department
Aberdeen City Council
Marischal College
Broad St
Aberdeen

EDINBURGH COLLEGE of ART
The University of Edinburgh
74 Lauriston Place
Edinburgh EH3 9DF

20-4-2015

Dear Mr Ferguson,

***Crombie Halls of Residence, College Bounds, Old Aberdeen
Restrospective Application for Listed Building Consent for alterations to Main Hall***

I write to object to the above application for works already carried out, without permission, to this Category "A" listed building, one of the few surviving architectural works personally authored by Sir Robert Matthew – one of Britain's foremost postwar modernist architects, and the lead designer of the Royal Festival Hall project in London several years previously (1949-53).

The original sequence of public spaces within Crombie Halls had a free-flowing character, with large and small spaces juxtaposed with one another, that strikingly echoed the concept of the Festival Hall; but all of this has now been severely compromised by the works carried out. As the works are already in place, it can clearly be seen that damage has been done to the integrity of the building. The original Assembly Hall or Foyer and the adjoining Refectory should be viewed as a whole, with little interruption to the space from one end to the other, and with light from the magnificent East Window permeating throughout. The alterations which have been undertaken here have destroyed this sense of spaciousness and light, by enclosing part of the Hall with a new wall, dividing the width and forming a new 'corridor' with the remainder. The symmetry of the hall – the centrepiece of the building – has been destroyed, and the architect's concept of a Scandinavian style, free-flowing, light and spacious interior has been swept away by these alterations. Further damage has been done to the Refectory, where another, smaller corridor has been created in the north-west corner.

As biographer of Sir Robert Matthew (the architect of Crombie Hall), I am acutely aware of the national importance, indeed uniqueness, of this building, described by Historic Scotland as "an excellent and almost unaltered example" of Matthew's early post-war private practice work, and "among the very best 1950's Modern Movement buildings in Scotland".

The special interest of this Category "A" listed building is very much bound up with Matthew's concept of a Scandinavian-style hall of residence, incorporating light, width and spaciousness in his design for the Refectory and Assembly Hall. The work which has been done to this centrepiece (for

which consent is now sought), has undoubtedly significantly damaged the special interest of the building. For this to be rectified, all new sub-dividing walls should be removed, and the original proportions of the interior should be restored. This retrospective application for Listed Building Consent should therefore emphatically be refused.

Regards,

Miles Glendinning
Professor of Architectural Conservation
Director, Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies

Edinburgh College of Art (University of Edinburgh)
74 Lauriston Place
Edinburgh EH3 9DF
Scotland

Tel

Email:

37 Livingstone Court,
King Street,
Aberdeen
AB24 1SJ
18th April, 2015

Planning Department,
Aberdeen City Council,
Marischal College

Dear Sirs,

Crombie Halls of Residence, Old Aberdeen
-retrospective application for internal alterations to subdivide westmost portion of Main Hall
(Planning Application no 150392)

I am writing to lodge an objection to this application on the grounds that the unauthorised changes are no improvement and damage the special character of a Grade 'A' listed building.

I much preferred it as it was - an open, light and spacious area serving an attractive coffee lounge, which I remember being used for a ceilidh during a conference I went to. The lounge has been replaced, by means of a semi-glazed wall carving up the space, with a dark and unattractive restaurant area and a corridor. The work has taken away the spaciousness and freedom which was so much part of the character and appeal of the building. It has resulted in clear harm, and it is my view that the new wall should be removed and so restore the hall and the Category 'A' listed building to the original state.

Yours faithfully,

A.J. Fenwick, Ph.D.

George Milne

From: webmaster@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Sent: 14 April 2015 17:15
To: PI
Subject: Planning Comment for 150392

Comment for Planning Application 150392

Name : Clive B Fenton (for DOCOMOMO Scotland) Address : 19/2 Downfield Place, Edinburgh. EH11 2EJ

Telephone :

Email :

type :

Comment : DOCOMOMO Scotland wishes to lodge an objection to this retrospective planning application. The alterations proposed (and actually executed) compromise the architectural integrity of this listed building by inserting a partition wall to create an enclosed cafe; and a corridor through the foyer. These alterations are totally antithetical to the aesthetic intention of the architect's original design, which was an open plan arrangement. The ground floor plan is an essential element of Crombie Hall and is one of the key features that led to the building being listed at Category A. We recommend that the original plan be re-instated.

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Alex Ferguson
Dept of Planning
Aberdeen City Council
Marischal College
Aberdeen

11 Greenbrae Crescent
Denmore
Bridge of Don
Aberdeen
AB23 8LH

19th April 2015

Dear Mr Ferguson,

Crombie Halls of Residence, Old Aberdeen
Retrospective Application for Listed Building Consent
Application Number 150392

Old Aberdeen Heritage Society wishes to object in the strongest possible terms to the above application, for works carried out to this Category "A" listed building without permission.

Crombie Halls was granted Category "A" listed status by Historic Scotland in 2004, on account both of its exceptional design, and the fact that it is one of the finest examples of the work of the internationally recognised architect, Sir Robert Matthew, best known for designing the acclaimed Royal Festival Hall in London.

A definitive assessment of the importance of Crombie Hall can be found in its description by Historic Scotland in their listing entry:-

"Crombie Halls are an excellent and almost unaltered example of the early post-war private practice of Sir Robert Matthew.

They are among the very best 1950s Modern Movement buildings in Scotland"

This building is of considerable national importance, and its particular "special character" and "special interest" must be safeguarded. It is clearly of both architectural and historic interest, and also of special value because of the rarity of its kind, and its integrity; also especially its closeness to the original fabric and layout.

The Main Hall/Refectory, (which has been the subject of the unauthorised alterations), is the showpiece of Crombie Halls, and met with wide acclaim at the time of the grand opening by Her Majesty the Queen in August 1960. It featured prominently in architectural journals of the time, and the Refectory was actually placed on view in the Building Centre in Glasgow for all to see.

"Aberdeen University Review" also carried an article about the Queen's visit to open Crombie (vol 38 no.124) (underlining ours):-

"The refectory in which the ceremony was held is a noble room. It is spacious and dignified. The whole of its east side, facing King's, is a window, a living mural of the Powis trees".

The design of this remarkable Refectory/Hall was very much in tune with the then prevalent enthusiasm for Scandinavian-style architecture, with simple, open, light and spacious interiors. The concept was one of interconnectivity and space, and this Hall, in its two free-flowing sections gave expression to this ideal.

Crombie Hall itself has, indeed, been described by architectural historian W A Brogden as:-

"quintessentially '50s Scandinavian" (Aberdeen: an Illustrated Architectural Guide 1986)

This clearly, is a large part of the building's "special interest" and character, and it was most exuberantly expressed in the design of the Main Hall, and at its opening was justly celebrated as such.

Against this background, it is particularly regrettable that far-reaching alterations should have been made to the Main Hall of Crombie without seeking Listed Building Consent, or even, presumably, specialist advice on procedure. The erection of a pretty solid new wall, (even if partly glazed) extending the length of the Assembly Hall (recently a coffee lounge) from west to east, dividing the Hall into two unequal parts, was bound to have an effect on its character. The erection of a timber wall at the NW corner of the Refectory was also going to make an impact. This should have been recognised by the applicant, and advice sought on whether such work was appropriate.

As it is, the alterations have resulted in clear damage to the character of this Category "A" listed building, and harm to its special interest. The original proportions of the Hall have been obliterated, main doorways blocked off, and its once wide, spacious interior lost to sight. The symmetry of Matthew's design has also been lost, and his concept of a light, expansive Hall/Refectory has been completely disregarded. The westmost section of the Hall has been subdivided; first, into an enclosed and gloomy area used now as a somewhat expensive restaurant, and secondly, alongside this, the remaining part of the room has been turned into a glorified "corridor". These ugly changes impact on the whole length and width of the Hall and Refectory area, which are to be seen as a whole. The light streaming in at the magnificent floor to ceiling east window is meant to be seen from all parts of the Hall, and the sense of open space should be palpable.

The recent alterations (along with the plastering of both internal and external windows with dark coloured plastic film) have completely and utterly destroyed what was special about this showpiece of Crombie Hall.

It should be noted that this is not the first time that unauthorised works to a listed building have been carried out by the University, with several examples in recent years. This, along with a number of works undertaken without permission across the Conservation Area in Old Aberdeen, are a cause for concern.

It should also be noted that though ugly and inappropriate, the recent alterations are entirely reversible, being neither difficult nor expensive to remove. The westmost section of the Hall could revert to use as a Coffee Lounge, and the Refectory revert to its former use as a purpose-built Dining-Hall to provide both for students living in Crombie and Johnston Halls, and as a pleasant venue for visitors to Old Aberdeen to enjoy a proper lunch in beautiful surroundings, as it was before this facility was suddenly discontinued.

To sum up, Old Aberdeen Heritage Society views the recent alterations at Crombie Halls as inappropriate, intrusive, and completely out of character with this classic 1950s Modern Movement building. Not only do these works significantly damage the special interest of this building, but any approval of such changes could set an unacceptable precedent for similar radical alterations to the interiors of other Category "A" listed buildings across the city.

The Society accordingly requests that the City Council refuse this application for Listed Building Consent, and require the applicant to remove all the alterations (and, if possible, the coloured film from the windows), and restore this architectural gem to its original state.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs B McPetrie

Planning Secretary