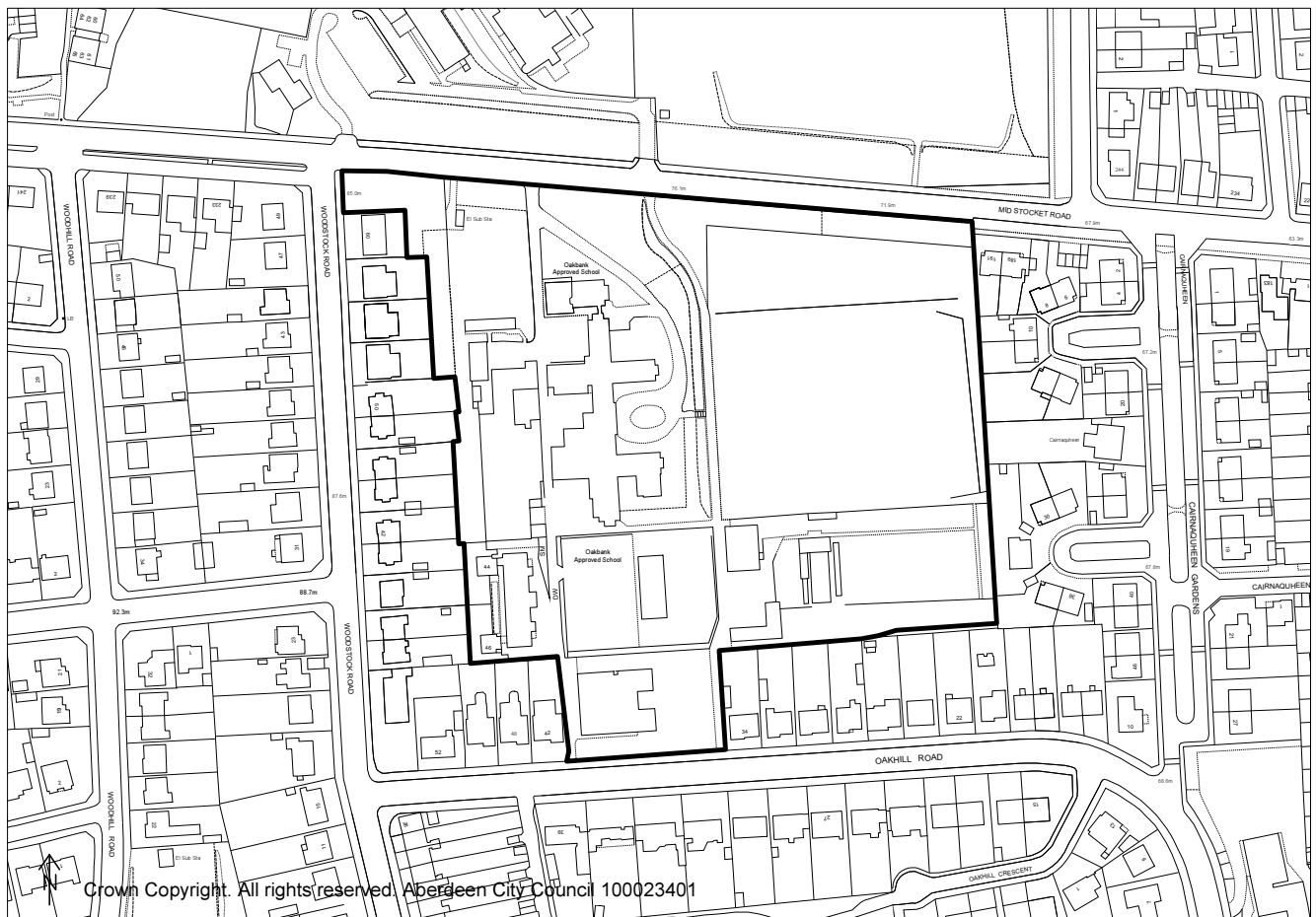


FORMER OAKBANK SCHOOL, MID  
STOCKET ROAD, ABERDEEN

DEMOLITION OF OAKBANK SCHOOL  
LODGE HOUSE

For: Carlton Rock Ltd

Application Ref.	: P090565	Advert	: Listed Building
Application Date	: 21/04/2009	Advertised on	: 29/04/2009
Officer	: Garfield Prentice	Committee Date	: 13 May 2010
Ward: Midstocket/Rosemount (B Cormie/J Laing/J Corall)		Community Council	: No response received



**RECOMMENDATION: Indicate a willingness to approve the application subject to the condition below and refer it to Historic Scotland**

## **DESCRIPTION**

The site is located on the south side of Midsocket Road, between its junctions with Cairnaquheen Gardens and Woodstock Road and comprises the buildings and grounds of the former Oakbank School. The site also has a 60 metre long frontage to Oakhill Road (between Nos. 34 and 42). The site is bounded to the west, south and east by the rear gardens of houses that front on to Woodstock Road, Oakhill Road and Cairnaquheen Gardens respectively. The houses on Woodstock Road are located generally between 12 and 24 metres from the site boundary. The houses at 20-34 Oakhill Road are located approximately 25 metres from the site boundary, while those properties at Nos. 42, 48 and 50 are between 10 and 15 metres from the site boundary. The distance from the site boundary of the houses on Cairnaquheen gardens varies significantly, but the nearest house is some 6 metres from the boundary.

The site is approximately rectangular in shape and extends to 3.8 hectares. It generally slopes down from west to east, the difference in levels being over 15 metres. The school site comprises several buildings, a playing pitch and almost 100 trees. The original main school building is a substantial and predominantly 2 storey granite structure. It is some 80 metres long with two 17 metre long wings extending out to the front and the rear of the building respectively. It is located approximately 35 metres from the west boundary and 45 metre back from and at right angles to Midsocket Road. At one time that building was listed, but was removed from the list of listed buildings many years ago. Immediately to the north of that building and linked to it by a short glazed corridor is the governor's lodge. It is a 2 storey granite house, built in the Arts and Crafts style and is a category C(s) listed building. To the west of the main school building are several undistinguished buildings of various styles and sizes (dating from the 1960s and 1970s), including the accommodation block, swimming pool block, woodwork/art/cookery building, laundry and garage/storage sheds. To the south of the main school building are another accommodation block and the main car parking area. To the east of the main school building is a playing pitch, which extends almost to the boundary with Cairnaquheen Road. To the south of the pitch are several buildings associated with the school's garden. There are four entrances into the site, two each from Midsocket Road and Oakhill Road. The main entrance is from Midsocket Road, which divides into two driveways, one to the front and one to the rear of the main school building.

The governor's lodge, dating from 1915, was design by Harbourne MacLennan of Jenkins & Marr. It is a good late example of an Arts and Crafts house with some Tudor decorative detailing. It is a 2 storey asymmetrical cottage style house, constructed of granite with mock timber-framing and connecting corridor to the north wing of the main school building. The building was listed as category C(s) in 1998.

## **PROPOSAL**

Listed building consent is sought for the demolition of the building. The whole of the building would be demolished. The purpose of the demolition is to facilitate the redevelopment of the larger school site as an office business park, which is the subject of planning application 090566.

The application is accompanied by a Supporting Planning Statement and a Historic Asset Appraisal.

## **REASON FOR REFERRAL TO SUB-COMMITTEE**

This application has been referred to the Sub-committee because the proposal attracted six or more letters of objection from the public. Accordingly, the application falls outwith the scope of the Council's Scheme of Delegation

## **CONSULTATIONS**

ROADS SECTION – No observations

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH – No observations

COMMUNITY COUNCIL – No response received

HISTORIC SCOTLAND – The consultation response is appended to this report. In summary, Historic Scotland advises that there should be a presumption against the demolition of the building. The lodge is listed at category C(s) which identifies it as being of local interest. Even if the building has undergone changes since it was listed in 1998, the building still satisfies the criteria for listing. This is on the basis that it is the work of prominent Aberdeen architects following in the design and craftsmanship traditions of the Arts and Crafts movement. Although not specifically referred to in the description, the building is clearly integral to the history of Aberdeen in marking the role of the site in the education and welfare of Aberdeen's people in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

In cases where the building is identified as still being of special interest a case for demolition would normally go on to focus on its condition, the efforts made to keep the building in use and any perceived benefits to the community that might arise from its loss. The building appears to be in reasonably sound condition. It seems likely that it would not be difficult to find a restoring owner for the building. The fact that the demolition of category C(s) listed buildings must be notified to Historic Scotland indicates that it is a matter of national interest.

## **REPRESENTATIONS**

20 letters of objection have been received from members of the public. Whilst opposition to the demolition of the governor's lodge is implicit in many of the letters of objection lodged against the application for the office business park, only 20 letters specifically refer to this application (quoting reference 090565) and the demolition of the listed building. The objections raised relate to the following matters.

- Demolition of the building would be against Historic Scotland's guidance that there is a presumption against demolition unless it can be shown that there is no viable alternative
- Demolition would rob future generations of outstanding architectural beauty and craftsmanship
- The building is of historic importance
- Demolition would set an undesirable precedent and undermines the whole point listed buildings
- Demolition is not essential to deliver significant benefits to economic growth or benefits to the community
- The building is capable of being repaired and reused
- Demolition would be contrary to local plan policy

## 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 subject planning policy relating to the historic environment is a relevant material consideration. Government's policy and guidance is set also set out in the Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP)

### Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan

A key objective of the structure plan is to make sure new development maintains and improves the region's important built, natural and cultural assets.

### Aberdeen Local Plan

Policy 10 'New Uses for Listed Buildings' states that the Council will consider alternative uses for redundant listed buildings, which will permit better use and maintenance of the properties. Any alterations needed to accommodate the new uses should not destroy or seriously harm the essential character or setting of the buildings.

Policy 13 'Retention of Granite Buildings' seeks to encourage the retention of granite buildings throughout the City, even if not listed or in a conservation area. Conversion and adaptation of redundant granite buildings will be favoured. Where a large or locally significant granite building that is not listed or in a conservation area is demolished, the Council will expect the original granite to be used on the principal elevations of the replacement building.

## EVALUATION

Sections 25 and 37(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 require that where, in making any determination under the planning acts, regard is to be had to the provisions of the Development Plan, so far as material to the application, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Where a proposal affects a listed building, Section 14(2) 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 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.

SPP states "*Planning authorities should support the best viable use that is compatible with the fabric, setting and character of the historic environment. The aim should be to find a new economic use that is viable over the long term with minimum impact on the special architectural and historic interest of the building or area*". It also states "*There is a presumption against demolition or other works that will adversely affect a listed building or its setting*".

SHEP states that key principle of the Scottish government's policy is that "*there should be a presumption in favour of preservation of individual historic assets and also the pattern of the wider historic environment; no historic asset should be lost or radically changed without adequate consideration of its significance and of all the means available to manage and conserve it*". It also states that there is "*a presumption against demolition (to a listed building) or other works that adversely affect the special interest of a listed building or its setting*".

Where it is proposed to demolish a listed building, SHEP advises that applicants will be expected to provide evidence to show that *“(a) the building is not of special interest; or (b) the building is incapable of repair; or (c) the demolition of the building is essential to delivering significant benefits to economic growth or the wider community; or (d) the repair of the building is not economically viable and that it has been marketed at a price reflecting its location and condition to potential restoring purchasers for a reasonable period”*. It is important to note that only one of the criteria listed above requires to be met and not all of them.

The Supporting Planning Statement submitted by the applicant sets out his case for the demolition of the listed building. It is argued that Policy 10 of the local plan refers specifically to new uses for such buildings and not to their demolition and thus only SHEP is relevant to the consideration of the application. It is the applicant's opinion that the governor's lodge *“is not of any special interest and its demolition is essential in order to deliver the significant benefits to economic growth”* that the office business park would provide. The Historic Asset Appraisal submitted by the applicant provides an appraisal of the listed building and sets out a more detailed case for its demolition. The report concludes that the building is of questionable architectural quality and has been the subject of a number of internal and external alterations, all of which have had a detrimental impact upon the buildings' aesthetics and character. It also states that the building is a poor example of the Arts and Crafts style of architecture.

Historic Scotland has been consulted on the proposed demolition of the governor's lodge and has reviewed the Historic Asset Appraisal submitted by the applicant. As set out above and in the letter appended to this report, Historic Scotland does not accept that a case has been made for the demolition and states that there should be a presumption against demolition.

Policy 13 of the local plan seeks to retain granite buildings throughout the City, in particular those that are listed or those located within a conservation area. The demolition of the governor's lodge would result in the loss of a listed granite building. Accordingly, the proposal is contrary to Policy 13.

Policy 10 of the local plan encourages alternative uses for redundant listed buildings. Although the policy does not specifically mention or relate directly to the demolition of listed buildings, it is nevertheless clear that the underlying purpose of the policy is to ensure that such buildings are maintained and retained. Thus whilst the proposal is not technically contrary to the policy, it fails to meet its underlying aim.

The application requires to be assessed against the four criteria listed in SHEP.

#### The building is not of special interest

The governor's lodge is a category C(s) listed building. SHEP sets out the criteria for determining whether a building is of 'special character or historic interest'. The principles of selection for listing a building are broadly: age and rarity, architectural or historic interest and close historical associations. The architectural style of governor's lodge which follows the Arts and Crafts movement is reasonably rare in Aberdeen, there being only a few good examples. Also, the building was designed by the prominent and respected architect Harboure Maclennan of Jenkins & Marr. The building was judged by Historic Scotland in 1998 to meet the criteria for listing at category C(s). Any alterations that may have been carried out since that time have not had an undue adverse impact on the historic interest of the building. It is the view of Historic Scotland that the building has not changed significantly since it was listed in 1998 and thus it would still stand up to a fresh appraisal under the same criteria today. It is therefore considered that the building is of historic interest and thus demolition is not justified under this criterion.

### The building is incapable of repair

The building would appear to be in a reasonable sound condition and state of repair. It would not be difficult to carry out upgrading works that would sympathetic to the listed status of the building. Therefore demolition is not justified under this criterion.

### The demolition of the building is essential to delivering significant benefits to economic growth or the wider community

There primary purpose for the proposal to demolish the listed building is to facilitate the redevelopment of the site as an office business park. The scale, form and layout of the proposed office development require the existing access road to be upgraded. In order to improve and widen the access to an appropriate standard, based on the layout proposed, it would be necessary to either demolish the governor's lodge or to fell several protected trees on the opposite side of the access. However, it would be possible with a different form and layout of development to provide the required standard of access into the site without losing either the listed building or the trees. For example, instead of the access road following the existing alignment of the driveway to the front of the main school building, a road could quite easily be taken to the west of the governor's lodge and to the rear of the main school building. That would allow for the lodge and most of the trees to be retained. This would result in a significantly different form of development. Such access arrangements would still in theory allow a substantial office development on the site that would deliver significant economic benefits. Accordingly, the demolition of the building is not essential to the redevelopment of the site. Notwithstanding, in order to deliver the proposed office development (if granted planning permission), which would make a significant contribution to Aberdeen's economy, it is considered that the demolition of the building can be justified in this case.

### The repair of the building is not economically viable and that it has been marketed at a price reflecting its location and condition to potential restoring purchasers for a reasonable period

No evidence has been produced to demonstrate that the governor's lodge has been marketed at a price that would be attractive to potential restoring purchasers. Thus the demolition is not justified on this criterion.

In conclusion, the demolition of the governor's lodge does not meet any of the criteria set out above. It is also contrary to the Government's policy that there is a presumption against the demolition of listed buildings. There is no compelling case or justification for the demolition of the building. The only justification is to allow the office development in the form and layout as currently proposed to be delivered. Therefore, if Members resolve to refuse the office development (submitted under planning application 090566), then this application must also be refused on the grounds that there is no other justification for the demolition of the listed building.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**Indicate a willingness to approve the application subject to the condition below and refer it to Historic Scotland**

(1) that no demolition whatsoever of the building shall take place unless and until the developer has submitted to the planning authority evidence of a legally binding contract

entered into between the developer and his/her builders in respect of the proposed redevelopment of the site in accordance with planning application reference 090566 and a fixed date for commencement of the works on site and the planning authority has confirmed in writing that such evidence is acceptable for the purpose of this condition - that the justification for demolishing the building is to facilitate the implementation of that specific office development.

**Dr Margaret Bochel**

Head of Planning and Sustainable Development