

the
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Scottish Charity No.
SC012569

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Gavin Evans
Case Officer
Aberdeen City Council

Our Ref: 1357

23rd June 2014

Dear Gavin Evans,

Re: 140698 Former St. Nicholas House, Broad Street, Aberdeen

Mixed use development including office, hotel, retail, restaurant, leisure, civic space including car parking, access, landscaping, infrastructure and public realm improvements

The Trust has examined this application for the above and wishes to comment as follows:

The Scottish Civic Trust supports the comments of our affiliated group Aberdeen Civic Society. Please see their response for details of relevant policies.

The Design and Access and Heritage Statements contain a significant amount of analysis of the context within which the application site sits. The urban design approach as described therefore seems well considered and reflects the historic development of this site.

The proposed layout is welcomed, with some reservations. While the St Nicholas Shopping Centre does turn its back on Flourmill Lane, we are concerned that this development proposes to retain the lane as a service/back lane. We do feel that this development could begin to make linkages here, which any future redevelopment south of the application site could build on to reintroduce active frontage to the lane and improve its general environment.

While the layout is well considered, we feel that the proposals are less successful in elevation. The design statement analysis notes the interest, variety and delicate detailing at roof level in the surrounding buildings, and the tension between lower roof levels and higher points, creating prominent towers and landmarks; none of this is reflected in the elevations proposed. A general height of 7 storeys across the site is, we feel, a significant increase over the general height in this area of 4/5 storeys, as identified on page 22 of the Design Statement. This height results in an overly bulky massing, despite the best intentions of the footprint.

In terms of design the elevations are uninspiring, looking much like any other development of this kind, in any other Scottish city centre. What is lacking here is the human scale and intimacy promised by the proposed footprint. The assessment of the historic townscape in the Design Statement suggests a dense area, with buildings that are varied in height, plot width and style, yet drawn together with familiar materials and repeated rhythms. Unfortunately these proposals have failed to achieve this diversity and are instead a large mass with little distinction between the parts and a flat horizontal roofline.

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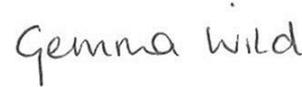
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The existing low roofline of St Nicholas House at least allows the Category A-Listed Marishal College to remain the focus of Broad Street, with the tower providing a dramatic contrast preventing St Nicholas House from being entirely subservient. In contrast, these proposals would introduce a large and tall building directly opposite Marishal College, creating a canyon-like effect, which would be to the detriment of the setting of the listed building.

In summary, while we feel that while this application makes some general moves in the right direction in terms of layout, the Trust feels that these proposals are not yet befitting of the very high quality built environment surrounding the site. We encourage the Council to refuse this application, and to work towards a more fully resolved solution with improvements in elevational treatment and massing, to better reflect the character of the surrounding area, and to ensure that the setting of several nationally important listed buildings is not negatively impacted by this development.



John Pelan
Director



Gemma Wild
Technical Officer

cc

Historic Scotland, AHSS, Aberdeen Civic Society

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