



Head of Planning & Regeneration
Perth and Kinross Council
Pullar House
35 Kinnoull Street
Perth
PH1 5GD

Our Ref: **1355**

the
Tobacco Merchants
House
42 Miller Street
Glasgow
G1 1DT

Tel: 0141-221 1466
Fax: 0141-248 6952
E:sct@scottishcivictrust.org.uk
www.scottishcivictrust.org.uk

14th March 2014

Dear Mr Littlejohn,

Re: 14/00292/LBC: PERTH CITY HALLS, KING EDWARD STREET, PH1 5UG

Demolition of City Halls

The Scottish Civic Trust wishes to **object** to this proposal to demolish Perth City Hall.

The Trust has previously formally objected to proposals to demolish the building in July 2011, principally because the application failed to satisfy the Scottish Historic Environment Policy criteria for demolition of a listed building.

This national policy requires applicants to provide evidence showing that a building is not of special interest; is incapable of repair; that demolition is essential to delivering significant benefits to economic growth; or that restoration is not economically viable and it has been marketed at a price reflecting its location and condition to potential restoring purchasers for a reasonable period.

In our view, the bid by Perth City Market Trust (PCMT) and the current planning application by the Seventy Group for hotel use suggest that there are viable options and potential restoring developers for the building which have not yet been fully supported and explored.

We note with concern that the report by D. Burke, Depute Chief Executive of Perth & Kinross Council to the full Council on 11 December 2013, outlining the marketing exercise, has a focus on 'Commercial Viability', 'Commercial Funding', and 'Commercial Terms', stating in Section 1.24 that:

"Jones Lang LaSalle has assessed the offer [from PCMT] in relation to the agreed criteria and their conclusion is that:

"The deliverability of their concept in terms of the proposed commercial terms, business case and funding arrangements are, in our opinion, lacking in detail and raise significant concerns regarding the ability of PCMT to deliver the project. Through our assessment PCMT have not provided us with sufficient information or evidence to substantiate their claim that they could successfully redevelop the City Hall as described in their proposal. Therefore, Jones Lang LaSalle are unable to support PCMT's proposal to redevelop Perth City Hall."

The bid from Perth City Market Trust was therefore rejected as commercially unviable by the Council's appointed (commercial) assessors. Of course, to operate an asset the group would need a level of professionalism, and a sustainable business case is vital, but the process must recognise that a community-led development is by

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its very nature not a purely commercially-driven project. Communities also need the time to organise themselves appropriately and to secure the expertise and advice needed. To have achieved what they have in 15 months is impressive in itself, and the project has also secured the support of The Prince's Regeneration Trust, the leading regeneration charity in the UK with a strong track record in exactly these types of projects.

The report by Mr. Burke also raises concerns about the level of public funding that might need to be secured to bring the development to fruition. It is certainly not unusual to seek public funding in such cases, indeed many key heritage-led regeneration projects including Verdant Works, Dundee and Anchor Mills, Paisley, received significant capital funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and similar funding bodies.

At our annual conference in November 2013 Anne McChlery of Glasgow Building Preservation Trust (GBPT) shared some of the challenges that they face in converting historic assets to new uses. She highlighted the difficulties of securing a patchwork of funding, the importance of a strong partnership with Glasgow City Council and the time it takes to get the 'package' of funding, use and business plan right. The reality is that Building Preservation Trusts and their projects exist because there is no 'commercial' solution for many 'at risk' historic buildings. GBPT has a strong track record over 30 years delivering solutions for Buildings at Risk – to expect a recently established community-led organisation to have all of the pieces of the jigsaw slotted into place in only 15 months is unrealistic.

PCMT's proposal is a community-driven development and as such the project needs the active support of the Council to be successful. If we want exciting, creative, community-led solutions to the problems posed by 'at risk' buildings (and the Scottish Government's drive towards Community Empowerment and asset transfer suggests that we do), then we need to be more creative about how we support these initiatives, and avoid assessing them in purely commercial terms.

The strength of public support for the reuse of the building is clear. We hope that Scottish Historic Environment Policy will prove to be robust enough to support a community-led solution for redeveloping this important site. The opportunity to transform Perth City Hall into a vibrant, dynamic new facility for the community and visitors still exists; the Scottish Civic Trust urges Perth and Kinross Council to go the extra mile to help make it happen.

John Pelan
Director

Gemma Wild
Heritage & Design Officer

