

# RHSPT

## The Royal High School Preservation Trust

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46 Charlotte Square  
Edinburgh EH2 4HQ

Frank Ross  
The Right Honourable The Lord Provost of Edinburgh  
City of Edinburgh Council  
253 High Street  
Edinburgh  
EH1 1PG

August 17, 2017

Dear Lord Provost

On August 31, the City of Edinburgh will decide the fate of one of Scotland's most important buildings, when councillors determine the application to turn the Old Royal High into a 127 room hotel, once and for all.

This decision is monumental and goes far beyond the redevelopment of a single listed building. The Council's decision will speak volumes about the value we place on our heritage, on our culture and on education. Indeed, it is viewed as such a significant decision internationally that a wrong step threatens the City's hard won UNESCO World Heritage status. This is a red line we should not cross for the sake of narrow commercial interests. Not when there is a better option.

The Royal High School Preservation Trust, St Mary's Music School and Dunard Fund have come together to propose an almost universally admired alternative to the hotel. As developer, tenant and funding partner, we have the vision and the resources to create a centre of excellence at the Old Royal High that will significantly broaden and enhance access to music and musical education for all, as well as making this exceptional building a true public asset.

Recent market research confirms that our proposals are supported by more than 80% of Edinburgh residents. Our plans will allow Scotland's *de facto* national music school to expand from 80 to 120 pupils, while extending its existing outreach programmes, masterclasses and workshops. This will offer new opportunities for the most promising young Scottish musicians, attract new talent from beyond Scotland and greatly extend the musical training available to young Edinburgh musicians of all levels of ability.

A new 280-seat concert hall will ease the undersupply of performance space in Edinburgh and be capable of staging over 100 public performances a year, attracting audiences of over 20,000 annually and contributing approximately £110m to the Edinburgh economy over the next 30 years.

Does a hotel for elite travellers conjure up the same sense of pride or aspiration as a school for musical young people whose only benchmark for admission is sheer talent and potential?

The hotel developers, Duddingston House Properties, have had eight years to come up with an acceptable proposal. Their previous planning application was turned down, even after a major redesign. They have since forced the City into a protracted appeal process and now decided it is appropriate to attack planners, politicians, statutory heritage bodies, local amenity bodies and ourselves as somehow being incapable of understanding the merits of their plans. They threaten us with lawyers and wave contracts in their defence. Are these the actions of responsible developers with confidence in their own scheme?

We have formally responded to their most recent attacks on us in a new submission presented to the Council this week. Their attempts to attack us are clumsy and ill founded. To claim our widely admired proposal puts the building at greater risk than their approach, which would see it drowned in concrete, is absurd. As shown in our new evidence to planners, they rely on a business plan which underestimates their project's construction costs by almost 50%. And as we have previously demonstrated, their Economic Impact Assessment is riddled with methodological and calculation errors, overstating the claimed benefit of their scheme to the Scottish economy by at least half.

So the sums just don't add up, but that's not the point. While process doesn't allow us the opportunity to answer their attacks on us at the planning hearing scheduled for 31<sup>st</sup> August, our detailed evidence substantiates the robustness of our proposals, from the technical aspects of our designs through to the viability and sustainability of the project. The facts speak for themselves; they speak of an opportunity for this city that cannot go unmissed.

Our proposed conservation and restoration of the iconic Thomas Hamilton building as the new home of St Mary's Music School was unanimously granted full planning permission and listed building consent 12 months ago with the unreserved backing of Historic Environment Scotland, the Council's planners, Edinburgh World Heritage, the Cockburn Association, the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, the New Town and Broughton Community Council and many others. The plans are informed by the advice of respected professional firms, considered leaders in their fields of conservation architecture and engineering. They are in place and ready to start.

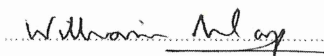
Moving St Mary's Music School to the Old Royal High represents a once in a generation opportunity to deliver a future for one of this city's greatest architectural masterpieces in a manner which enhances Edinburgh's heritage, culture and reputation for educational excellence. Together, we are asking you and your fellow councillors to do everything in your power to ensure that our scheme can proceed without further delay.

We hope the Council's response is the unanimous rejection of the hotel proposal.

Yours sincerely



WILLIAM GRAY MUIR  
Chairman  
Royal High School Preservation Trust



DR WILLIAM MOYES  
Chairman  
St Mary's Music School



DR CAROL COLBORN GRIGOR CBE  
Dunard Fund