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Coming Events

Wednesday 22nd January 2014: Aberdeen Art Gallery - Inspiring Art And Music. An illustrated talk by Ms Christine Rew, Art Gallery & Museums Manager, Aberdeen Art Gallery. At the RNUC, No. 9 Albyn Place, at 7.30 for 8 pm.

Wednesday 26th February 2014: Plans For Aberdeen Harbour - Directions For Growth. An illustrated talk by Mr Ken Reilly, Engineering Director, Aberdeen Harbour. At the RNUC, No. 9 Albyn Place, at 7.30 for 8 pm.

Friday 14th March 2014: our Annual Dinner at the Royal Northern & University Club. Our guest Speaker is to be Marc Ellington of Towie Barclay, who will address us on the topic of Heritage. No. 9 Albyn Place at 7.30 for 8 pm.

Wednesday 26th March 2014: Delivering A Large-Scale Development In Aberdeen. An illustrated talk by Mr Graham Bone, Managing Director, Drum Property Group. At the RNUC, No 9 Albyn Place, at 7.30 for 8 pm.

Our Awards Ceremony, 2013

It is my pleasure to be able, once more, to present the deliberations of this year's Civic Society Awards Committee.

There is no doubt that the Committee had a fair amount to look at compared with some recent years. In Aberdeen the recession seems to have ended, and building work is happening all around. Judging by the amount of building work going on at the moment – and also that which is in the pipeline - the Awards Committee will be busy in future years.

I am sure many of you will have noticed the new building work, because you can hardly miss it. It is taking place at Murcar and Dubford to the north, adjacent to the airport at Dyce, at Kingswells and just starting at Countesswells/Hazlehead to the west, and on the RGU campus in Garthdee and Cove to the south. The city centre itself also seems to be yielding many opportunity sites – not least in Broad Street where we have been privileged recently to

be able to see uncluttered (and probably temporary) views of Provost Skene's House. We have an Olympic-sized swimming pool part-built and approved plans now exist for the redevelopment of the Broadford Works. A number of former mills on the banks of the Don are in the process of re-development as is the area between Union Square and the Dee that previously was the home to many industrial fish processing businesses.

Large parts of Union Street now seem to be yielding opportunity sites. Buildings that have fallen into disrepair over the years are proposed for extensive re-development. Some of these proposals are of a scale that is very different to what has existed before, and this is something that is likely to change Aberdeen's skyline for ever. The future of Union Terrace Gardens is still a current discussion item – which I will not get into today, much to everyone's relief I am sure.

In many ways it is marvellous that Aberdeen has such opportunity; we are fortunate compared with other cities in the UK, many of which would do anything to receive this kind of investment in their own built environment. It is important though that we consider, scrutinise carefully and make our feelings known about it all. I have a particular concern about the longevity of development and the respect of our heritage. I can appreciate that it is at times difficult for those who are charged with making the decisions to always be happy with every decision that is taken, but I am not sure that we have a terribly good track record at it. For example, how sensible is it for us as a community to have used our resources, and capital investment in particular, to build huge schemes and then, in no more than half a lifetime, have to invest even more to destroy them! There is more than one of these projects around at the moment. I do think that it is short-sighted of us to believe that we can afford such extravagance. It may well be that we can afford it today, but are we sure that 50 years from now we will still have the money and capital available to make such similar large and far-reaching changes to our built environment. What we build today should have a shelf life that is much longer than half a lifetime if only to protect the investment.

Enough of all this - let us move on to this year's awards which is why we are here tonight. Each year the Civic Society awards individuals and firms that have made an investment to bring about change – change that improves the amenity of the city. Sometimes the changes are small but effective and sometimes they are large. Being large is not guaranteed of success as sometimes the larger projects are just not terribly effective. However, a large project is often difficult to ignore because it is sometimes just so big. Crucially our awards are not supposed to be solely architectural awards; they are more to do with the amenity that they bring to the city. Architecture does obviously play a part in this.

I will go through each of the nominations that we considered in turn. To some of these we are making an award – and to others we are not. For each I will try to give an overview of how we came to the position that we have. At the end of the presentation I will announce those projects to which we are making an award. The highest level of award that we give is called simply an Award. We give awards for craftsmanship and also make commendations, for schemes that do not quite deserve an award, and mentions, for schemes that have particularly good things about them that we feel is worth recognising.

As in previous years, in order to give a bit of structure to the presentation, I have split the nominations and considered them in three categories:

1. Restoration or Refurbishment
2. Developments within an existing built environment
3. Sites that do not have the benefit of a previous heritage

1. Restoration or Refurbishment:

Ashley Lodge

The work we considered here was the first phase of a project involving the conversion of an old building, the demolition of parts and construction of various additions. Future phases involve more new build. It is a residential scheme on the corner of Great Western Road and Pitstruan Place.

Effort had been made to ensure that new parts of the building that face Great Western Road - the front elevation - fitted well with the existing building. Instead of contrasting with the old, the new bits work with it, remaining subservient to the original building. The proportions have been respected, and the materials and detailing are all good. The rear of the building includes a more modern style, but still remains reserved. Small matters, like the way that the newly formed archway from Pitstruan Place has a traditional look, helps to make the public appearance one of harmony with its surroundings rather than conflict. We felt that this was such a welcome relief today where contrast seems to be more the norm.

I don't think that anyone on the Awards Committee saw anything that they did not like about the work, and we look forward to seeing a similar attention to detail in the next phase of the building work.

Jamie Oliver's Italian

We could not let the opportunity go by without mentioning something on Union Street. Jamie's Italian takes over two of the floors of part of the former Esslemont & McIntosh building at the Castlegate end of Union Street. A good job has been done to bring back into life a part of this building whilst retaining many of the things that are a part of its history – for example the retention of the mosaic sign on street elevations which still proudly proclaim the name Esslemont & McIntosh. If you didn't know where you were and if the granite is not enough to let you know you are in Aberdeen, the fact that Esslemont & McIntosh's name is still there gives it all an added sense of place. Some people on the Committee felt that some of the granite detailing by the entrance doorway looks a bit unfinished, while others felt that this was just part of what was trying to be achieved. In the end, and on balance, we just could not get too excited about it as without further work to the buildings, particularly the upper floors, we may get left with a problem that is so common nowadays to so much of Union Street – that of unused upper floors that become neglected and then gradually deteriorate. We would dearly love to see uses being brought back in to these upper floors

that would help to ensure the vitality of Union Street in particular and the centre of town generally.

50/52 College Bounds

Old Aberdeen is always a joy to visit and should be on the list of must-sees for every tourist to Aberdeen, and perhaps even to Scotland. One of the nominations this year was to consider the refurbishment work done to the buildings at 50/52 College Bounds. In particular the pointing which is done in the traditional way and - we were told - is called "cherry cocking pointing". Aberdeen Heritage Trust was involved in this work. I have to say that if you walk up the High Street and College Bounds in Old Aberdeen, you cannot fail to notice this work which makes these buildings really stand out.

Duthie Park

The last nomination in this category of restoration and refurbishment is Duthie Park. This well-loved and well-used Victorian park in Aberdeen has recently had a makeover. Alas it had deteriorated and efforts were made over recent years to raise the finance to do restoration work. The Heritage Lottery Fund gave assistance, the Council were in charge and all of this was encouraged by an active Friends group under the leadership of Tony Dawson. We heard about the work in one of our talks last year.

What has been done here is restoration. Putting back features that had become lost, fountains, ponds, mounds for flags, terraces, railings and gates. It is an absolutely fabulous restoration project, and one that the Awards Committee felt ticked so many of the boxes that is our remit, particularly when it came to amenity. The contribution to the community from this work will last for generations, and this is likely to last because of the active interest and involvement of the Friends. Those who have put their time, money and effort into the work deserve congratulations, and it is another example, as with Marischal College, of how Aberdeen City Council has shown, that it can carry out work that restores the heritage of our city.

Much of the work is of an extremely high standard. Details in the granite work are particularly notable, and you can see this everywhere when you visit - the way that the new steps have been formed linking the river, through the terrace and up to the main open space in the park, the restored ponds, walls and the flagpole.

There was some press coverage when the park re-opened about over-zealous parking officials who were after all only doing their job. I am glad to say that when we were on our bus trip looking at the nominations we managed to find a good spot to park the bus in without driving on the grass and so we managed to avoid getting a parking ticket! I understand that some people were not so lucky. The press like to have a reason to pick up a story that will sell copies of their paper and this was it for Duthie Park. There were one or two comments about the issue of parking from members of the committee as we considered the nomination, and some felt that the amount of parking was possibly not enough. However instead of just adding more parking, a better solution may be for the council to ensure that there are enough

similar parks in the developments around Aberdeen that people can easily walk to, and thereby reduce the need to take a car when visiting a park for a day out.

2. Developments Within An Existing Built Environment:

Let's now move on to the second category - that of developments within an existing built environment. Like the last category, developments within an existing built environment have some form of structure around and about with which they can relate.

34 Maberly Street

This is a development of flats in a tight site on Maberly Street. It is just off George Street and behind it lies the Broadford Works.

Some on the Committee felt that this block is a good example of a modern style of tenement flat. It fits in and is of the 21st century. Others expressed some concern about the detailing, for example the cut-away corner on the George Street side and the fairly small entrance door. For those with a trained eye, the proportions seem wrong. There were some comments about the car parking dominating the space in front.

There is an interesting link here with Duthie Park; in that one former owner of the property that used to be on this site was Miss Elizabeth Crombie Duthie, who gifted the land at Duthie Park to the city in 1880. Sadly her house was demolished to make way for this development but she is not completely forgotten as there is an original gate and plaque noting Miss Duthie's generosity. This is a nice touch, but we felt that it was a shame that more could not have been done to make this arch more of a feature of the development rather than use it to just try to hide the bin store.

Malcolm Road

We looked at two separate properties on Malcolm Road in Peterculter, both of which are on the same side of the road and relatively close to each other.

66 Malcolm Road, Peterculter

This is the smaller of the two. It sits in a fairly tight site between the two adjacent properties. There is a difference in ground level which has had to be taken into account through the design. In doing this the designer has used a sloping roof. The effect of this is that the building lacks natural symmetry. Because the site is so small, after the house was built there is not much space left for garden. The Committee felt that the site was a little overdeveloped.

The use of fencing in new development is often overpowering, and you can see this clearly here. Travelling north up Malcolm Road, the fencing at the front is really quite unsightly.

106 Malcolm Road, Peterculter

The second house we looked at was much more generous, both in terms of its site and property size. It has the appearance of a small terraced house "book-ended" at each end. It

therefore has strong symmetry, something that was lacking in the smaller house in Malcolm Road.

The Committee thought that this property had character and made a statement. Some of the architects on the Committee felt that there was something not quite right. It may have been its size (as the property really is fairly big), the relative proportions of the front elevation or the window openings. The exposed guttering and downpipes at the front could have had better detail or have been made in a different material. However, the general impression was favourable and one thing that did impress us all was that the standard of design was high and yet this was achieved without a firm of architects being involved in the design work at all.

Astoria, Culter House Road

This house is the third individual house that we looked at in the Peterculter area. I would defy anyone to drive past this house and not want to stop and take a photograph. There is no doubt that it is an interesting property. The area around it is mainly a mix of suburban houses in Culter House Road, some old and some new. This house just sits within a pretty and established plot surrounded by trees.

We felt that this was the best house of all the new single houses that we were considering in this year's nominations. Some described it as "splendid" and others could see it being used to film an episode of Poirot. Despite being a bit block-like it was very unusual and it is fair to say that everyone on the Committee liked it, sitting as it does, an unusual and modern design, all at peace within lovely landscaped grounds.

6 Ruthrieston Crescent

This is a new block of flats located in an area that would have originally been local authority built housing. It is visible from South Anderson Drive, particularly if you have to wait in a queue of traffic heading south to get onto the roundabout at the Bridge of Dee.

There were some diverse opinions about this scheme. It was liked because it is relatively pleasing to the eye, particularly when viewed in the context of its surroundings which are not that special. It is a tidying up of the site and the scale of the new building is consistent with what exists close by. It does not appear to overpower.

However some felt that the building was let down by some of the detailing, for example the details at the windows. The front was unfortunately a car park and the building line does not appear to relate to any of the existing buildings.

Despite all of this, the Committee thought that this development fitted in well and actually made a significant improvement to the built environment in the area. It was therefore very worthy of consideration.

515-519 Holburn Street

There are two new blocks of flats located relatively close together on Holburn Street. Both are located on land previously occupied by petrol filling stations. This first one is at 515 - 519

Holburn Street and is now an RGU hall of residence (previously it was a Texaco filling station). Of the two we considered on Holburn Street, this one we thought was the weaker. We felt that it had little that was special and it lacked details that could have made it appealing. For example the corner onto Crathie Terrace is really quite bland and the rear elevation is not terribly interesting.

Both of the blocks of flats on Holburn Street did have a street presence, as you can see here. The building is virtually on the street and any car parking is to the rear and well hidden from Holburn Street.

597 Holburn Street

This is the second block of flats on Holburn Street, this time on a site formerly occupied by an Esso filling station. Again you can see that the block addresses the street, set back a little by a small front garden. The design of this building creates more activity in the street because there is an arch leading to the car park at the rear and the front elevation also has two front doors leading out directly onto Holburn Street. A clever arrangement exists to cater for the required level access arrangements, whilst still allowing for steps.

The Committee felt that this block of flats was the better of the two that we considered; it has an interesting frontage and addresses the street well. Some of the detailing was mixed, for example the red banding at the upper level may well date fairly quickly and the boxes for the services are visible from the street at the front. However, an effective attempt has been made, through using horizontal banding at positions on the front elevation, to link the various elements together, like the windows and doors.

3. Sites That Do Not Have The Benefit Of A Previous Heritage:

We will now move on to the final category we considered – that of sites that do not have the benefit of any existing built heritage.

ENGTEQ

ENGTEQ's fabulous new building in Altens looks out from the current edge of the Industrial Estate towards the North Sea. It resembles nothing you have seen before with expanses of reflective coloured glass crouched rather like a giant frog ready to pounce down the slope.

The building here generated many adjectives as we discussed it, like sophisticated, elegant, simple, outstanding and striking. The glass corners and clean lines were praised.

It is unfortunate that the location of the building does it no favours. Due to the reflective glass you can see some of the adjacent buildings, which were described by one member of the Committee as "dross". The car park tends to dominate the front of the building and because of the reflective glass the parking area seems extra big because it is similarly reflected in the glass. Being overly critical, the entrance to this startling building is probably a bit on the small side.

The Committee was however impressed. The owner and designer had put some effort into doing something better than is normal for an industrial building. Industrial estates need of this type of approach to improve their general ambiance and therefore we strongly felt that this is something that should be encouraged.

Donside Mill

This is an interesting and unique development lying just to the north of Tillydrone, between it and the River Don. It is on the site of a former industrial mill complex. What is being built here is a combination of houses and flats, but in a way that is completely differently to many new developments.

A great and noble effort has been made to create an outward looking development, looking out over the River Don rather than turning its back to it. The river is therefore an asset to the development. The buildings create a series of streets in which there is tremendous variety albeit a bit fussy. We feel that the blocks of flats on the site are a bit disappointing, some of them located remotely from the streets rather than integral with them and towering over them due not only to their building height but also because they are located further up the hill. Whilst the development is interesting, the Committee felt that it is not quite right, let down as it is by the blocks of flats that are nothing special at all and the fussiness of it all. We do however congratulate the developer of this site for having taken the approach that they have. It is a bold decision to take to develop in this way and the approach should be encouraged.

City View Business Park

This is a new development of offices in West Tullos industrial estate. It lies in amongst the new car showrooms on Wellington Road, and in its previous life was, I think, the Renault dealership. We considered the first phase of the work, which involves two completed buildings. A third building is still under construction.

Bearing in mind this building is located in the middle of a sea of new car showrooms, where it is important to have cars on public display; it was a relief to see that this development does not show off the cars, it takes them round the back and out of sight. The buildings are located closer to the street because of this and so they do, to some extent, address the street. It is a shame that there is no direct pedestrian access from the street into the buildings, but this is probably because of the slope on the site which would have made this difficult to achieve.

The building is a bit dark and much use has been made of black and dark grey in the materials palette. Indeed the materials that have been used are nothing special. This split the Committee and caused some discussion, even to the extent that one of the team (who was in a minority I might add) commented that it was the best looking Soviet Bloc building he had seen in Aberdeen! None of the rest of us was that sure whether or not this particular member of the group had ever been to the Soviet Bloc, but it certainly made for a lively discussion. When we had all calmed down we took a slightly more balanced view and the Committee felt that it was good to see that an attempt has been made in an industrial estate

to address the street with the building rather than a car park and felt that this made it a worthy entrant to this year's list.

Maggie's Aberdeen

The new Maggie's centre in Aberdeen has had a fair bit of publicity when it opened a few weeks ago. It is located on the edge of the Foresterhill Hospital Campus and is visible from Westburn Road. I can guarantee that anyone living locally will have heard of it and probably also seen or been a part of various fund-raising activities, which included plastering images of various local worthies all over the sides and backs of double decker buses!

It is an interesting shaped building, described by some as a pebble or a spaceship. After seeing it in real life, one of the Committee called it a doughnut.

There are a number of interesting things about the building. It is actually quite small. Internally separate spaces, or "rooms", are formed just by the positioning of cupboards, stairs or other wood panelled partitions. There are two floors in the building, with the upper floor more of a mezzanine level containing seating areas and leading to the outside balcony.

From a construction point of view the formation of the concrete shape could not have been easy. There is hardly a straight line in the place, the whole building curved in three dimensions. There is a sheltered courtyard area at the front which faces west and will therefore receive warm evening sun.

Internally the standard of the joinery and woodwork is very impressive. The term joinery doesn't really do it justice; it is more like cabinet making, with hardly a straight line in the place. The unusual external shape forces the unique internal shapes; they could not be anything else. Painstaking work and time has obviously been spent making sure it all fits together, and the result makes you want to just explore. It is not big, and therefore not intimidating, but it is actually a very attractive and comforting building. I have no doubt that it will become popular with those use it.

RGU – New Academic Building at Riverside East

This is a new building on the Robert Gordon's University campus overlooking the River Dee. You may well have seen the green circular building that has gone up over the last year and a half – well, this is the university's new library - RGU's attempt not to be out-done by the glass cube that is Aberdeen University's library which we considered and made an award to last year.

We were shown around the buildings by Shane McGinn. In actual fact calling it a building is not a good description; more accurately it is a group of buildings laced together by an internal street. The buildings house the pharmacy and engineering schools as well as the library. It has cafés, bars, break-out areas and Roman amphitheatre-style performance areas. The buildings curve as a reflection of the shape of the River Dee.

Shane commented on our visit that he did not know how any student was going to manage to work in the library because they are likely to spend all their day looking out at the panoramic views over Aberdeen. That is probably not far off the mark, because the views from the top of the circular building are really quite stunning.

Many of the graduates in our party - who probably were at university shortly after the war - were walking around this brand new set of buildings muttering to themselves about how being at University in their day was nothing like this! I have to say that even I was thinking that! It is pretty amazing. There is no doubt that this latest addition to the RGU campus is seriously classy; the spaces, the heights, the colours, the light, the volumes and the scale. It must have been an architect's nightmare to make sure that it all worked, and that levels and bridges were in the right place and that it could all work with today's exacting building regulations. For all those professionals out there all I can say is "what a fee"!

We visited just as the university was getting ready for the influx of new students. Everything was so clean and brand new. Term has now started and with time the students will make their presence known. However, I am sure that when they arrived in the new building they will have been as impressed as we were. This is quite some addition to the RGU campus and to the city of Aberdeen. It is an investment that will do much to propel RGU even further up the list of desirable places to study in the UK. Very impressive indeed!

Award Winners

That completes the round-up of nominations that made it onto our final list this year. What I will do now is to move on to announcing the awards.

We start with the category of **Mention**. A Mention is given to a project that can be seen to make a definite contribution to an area or place. The scale of this may be restricted in some way, but there can be no doubting the improvements that these projects bring.

Mentions this year are given to:

ENGTEQ

Owner	C A N Ltd
Architect	W C P Architects
Contractor	M T M Construction

CITY VIEW BUSINESS PARK

Owner	Knight Property Group
Architect	Space Solutions
Contractor	Andrew Cowie Construction

6 RUTHRIESTON CRESCENT

Owner Mr Jim Mills
Architect Mackie Ramsay Taylor
Contractor G & H Properties

595 HOLBURN STREET

Owner C A F Properties Ltd
Architect Fitzgerald & Associates
Contractor Bancon Construction

Now to the **Commendations**. A Commendation is a higher level of award. It is given to projects that are seen to make a real contribution to Aberdeen, but there may be something, just something that is not quite right. It may be the location, the materials used or some design aspect that gives rise to a Commendation rather than a full Award.

Commendations this year are given to:

ASHLEY LODGE

Owner Tweed Homes Ltd
Architect Fitzgerald & Associates
Contractor Tweed Homes Ltd

ASTORIA, CULTER HOUSE ROAD

Owner Mr Bob Drummond
Architect Fitzgerald & Associates
Developers Crimond Estates

106 MALCOLM ROAD

Owner Miss Pauline Souter
Designer Miss Pauline Souter

One nomination is receiving both a **Commendation** and an **Award for Craftsmanship**. An Award for Craftsmanship is given to those who we feel have demonstrated an understanding of the impact on their surroundings of getting the details right. When the details are executed correctly, and to the highest standards they make a significant contribution to place making.

A Commendation and Award for Craftsmanship for the joinery/cabinet making goes to:

MAGGIE'S ABERDEEN

Owner Maggie's
Architect Snohetta
Contractor Robertson Construction Eastern

And now to our main awards. An **Award** is the highest honour we give. We give an Award only to projects that we feel really deserve one. We would like to think that it is difficult to

argue with our decisions because the finished project makes a real contribution to our city. Some people may like the contribution and others may not, but there is little doubt that a contribution is being made.

Receiving an **Award** is:

THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY, RIVERSIDE EAST

Owner	Robert Gordon University
Architect	B D P
Contractor	Miller Construction

Our final award and second in the category of **Award**, is also receiving an **Award for Craftsmanship** for the granite work. It goes to:

DUTHIE PARK RESTORATION PROJECT

Owner	Aberdeen City Council
Landscape Architect	URS Infrastructure & Environment UK Ltd
Contractor	Hunter Construction Aberdeen

Written and presented by our Chairman, Dominic Fairlie.