



Registered Charity No. SC003089

Newsletter No. 90: March/April 2016

Coming Events

Wednesday 27th April 2016: our Annual General Meeting, which will be followed by a presentation of topical interest. At the Royal Northern & University Club, No. 9 Albyn Place, Aberdeen, at 7.30 pm prompt.

Saturday 11th June 2016: our Summer Outing, which this year is to Kinnaird Castle near Brechin, the home of the Duke and Duchess of Fife. Details will follow in due course.

Our 2016 Annual Awards Ceremony will be held at 7:30pm on **Wednesday 26th October 2016** at the Town House.

Planning Matters - An Objection

The application in question relates to No. 597 Holburn Street, Aberdeen, at the corner of Holburn Street and Riverside Place. The proposal is for demolition of the existing bungalow and the erection of a large 3-storey block of student flats. It is likely that this junction will remain busy even once the AWPR is opened - heavy trucks have to make this detour so as to avoid the Brig o' Dee. There is only limited parking provision on the site and similarly limited opportunity for short-term street parking in the immediate area, with double yellow lines around it and a bus stop on the other side of the road. The proposal is for student accommodation and at busy times there will be a lot of activity, loading and unloading, as at the beginning and end of an academic year. It is likely that safety will be compromised at these times unless some form of management system is put in place and organised.

The assumption with such developments of student flats is that students do not have cars and that there need be little or no provision for car parking. But in point of fact many students do run cars and even those who don't are likely to have car-borne visitors. It seems wrong to allow this development to proceed without a proper review of how traffic and parking will be managed.

The existing property, a low-rise bungalow, is nothing special. However, the property is at least low-rise, is set well back from the adjacent thoroughfares and pavements, is built of traditional materials and surrounded by trees and shrubs. The proposed new block will doubtless extend right to the periphery of the site and will be three storeys high. The student accommodation will be very close to heavy traffic, morning, noon and night. There will be an obvious problem of vehicle exhaust emissions and atmospheric and noise pollution. Will the students ever be able to open the windows of their tiny flats?

Similarly, there is the issue of the 'window' on to the river bank made available by the present low-rise bungalow to the left and the woodland area to the right - an attractive vista as viewed from the opposite side of Holburn Street, the bus stop and Ruthrieston Road. The proposed development would narrow down that green vista considerably.

At present, residential properties are granted some enclosure and privacy by the relatively high granite stone walls on the public face of the site, i.e., Holburn Street and Riverside Place. The application does not clearly indicate the details of the boundary treatments. It would help if there were street scenes included in the application pack. Adjacent development on Riverside Drive some years ago managed to retain the existing boundary walls unchanged and this has resulted in a useful separation of the residential properties from the busy and noisy thoroughfare. We are therefore concerned about the loss of the traditional walling feature that is so important in providing a sense of place.

On the basis of the above we therefore object to the application.

Annual Awards Ceremony for 2015

The Civic Society Awards Ceremony for 2015 took place at the Town & County Hall on 21 October 2015. It was hosted by Councillor George Adam, the Lord Provost of Aberdeen and attended by award winners and a number of our members.

The awards sub-committee, under the chairmanship of Alan Silver, were delighted to have made a number of awards under the categories of Mentions and Commendations. This year there were no full Awards nor was there an Award for Craftsmanship as the committee considered that whilst there were some strong contenders, none of the nominations actually came up to the high standards that are expected of projects.

This is an extract of the presentation on those projects that received an award:

This year three projects received a Mention:

Dandara Development at Stoneywood

This site lies between Bucksburn and Dyce, in land that originally would have been part of Stoneywood Mill.

The site benefits from a stunning landscape with well-established trees and pockets of open areas. This is a large development scheme that has been on the go for some time now.

It has been successful in that it makes good use of the landscape features and has augmented what is there already with extensive planting in the open areas and the gardens of the private properties.

The properties are predominantly white with some timber panelling. Walls have been used extensively to differentiate between the private and public realm.

One thing that Dandara has done is that it has taken mixed use to heart. They have built on the site both their own offices and a small convenience shop,

operated by the Co-Op. A little separate as a building perhaps, but good none the less.

Some of the detailing of the buildings, in particular the very white render may not weather too well in future. However, these were minor gripes in the overall scheme of things, and it was the landscaping that was picked up on repeatedly by members of the awards committee. A very good effort, and work still in progress.

Office at 32-34 Queens Road

This used to be the corner shop and restaurant called the Olive Grove on Queens Road.

Now it is an office with an extension to the side and another one to the rear. The side extension is very visible from Queens Road, but in fact both are visible from the local network of streets and lanes. The extension to the side is shaped to reflect that of the old tollbooth on Queens Road. It is built of granite and glass, but it was not the materials, it was more the form and shape that was interesting.

The second extension at the rear of the building is boxier in shape. We felt that this had has nowhere near the same quality and impact as the side extension.

There is a modern extension also on the building on the other side of the lane, and the two (that one and this) work pretty well together. Some on the committee questioned the use of railings, and suggested that they did not add that much – in fact it may have looked better with no railings at all. Despite this we felt the work here was good, and we liked the side extension more than we did the rear one.

SO Café on Union Street

The “SO” café now occupies the property that was Waterstones bookshop on the corner of Union Street and Bon Accord Street. The rather ugly canopy over

the pavement has been removed and more traditional signboard and frontage has been put up.

It has transformed this corner, making it much more visually attractive.

There were comments in the committee that there was some modern detailing which did not sit particularly well with the traditional appearance of the signboard. But in general we liked the improvement that had taken place to this important and noticeable corner on Union Street.

Five Projects received a Commendation:

Annan House, Palmerston Road

This is a brand new office building located on Palmerston Road, the area that lies between the car park for Union Square and the River Dee. It is another new office development in the area that was formerly the home of so many small fishing businesses - now being taken over by big business.

Generally, we were impressed by this building. It is imposing. I am sure that many local people will have noticed it going up over the last few years as it is visible from a number of vantage points in the city.

It is built right on the street. Beside it is a multi-storey car park that is actually not too bad, and at least it takes the vehicles out of sight.

The more critical amongst us thought that the detailing was a bit simple and that the landscaping a little crude. For example, could the trees not have been planted in the street rather than in elevated planting beds? There were also questions about the longevity of some of the public realm works.

However, there were plenty of good things. For those on the committee who are concerned about the impact that development has on the street and the public realm, particularly in how the development is likely to encourage activity in the street, the whole development was seen as very positive. Last year I commented on the benefits that the existing street pattern has on the new

development in this whole area, meaning that any new development has to fit within the existing street pattern rather than generate its own. By doing this it is possible to avoid an overly dominant road design and it is therefore a much better experience for the pedestrian. We liked it. A good and positive impact on its surroundings.

House at 70 Springfield Avenue

This is a new house which sits on a prominent corner site of Springfield Road and Springfield Avenue.

It is very visible from Springfield Road. Some members of the awards committee were very taken with this property and thought that it worked “seamlessly” on the site, even though it is visually a little bizarre.

It is relatively compact, with parking underneath and good use has been made of the differences in level.

It was let down a little by some of the finer detail - things like the pointing and the way the windows were framed. It was obvious that some effort had been made to do things differently – for example the fences were a series of modern upright poles – not something that I had seen before. In summary, the materials could have been better, but in general it is good.

Frederick Street Car Park

Frederick Street lies north of the Castlegate between King Street and Park Street. We were looking at this car park. I have to say that this raised a few differing opinions amongst members of the awards committee. Last year we gave an award to the Health Centre on the opposite side of Frederick Street. The street has been untidy for some time but the new development that has taken place in the last few years – and on both sides of the street - has definitely improved the public realm and feel of the area, and this car park is one of those new developments.

The car park is visually sculptural – it is the combination of the galvanised panels, the mix of parallel lines created by the ramps visible behind the facade facing the street and the industrial nature of it all makes it what it is. The architects amongst us thought this was a highlight, creating an interesting visual contrast to other buildings in the street.

Some on our committee raised concerns about the building's practicalities, using it at night when some of the lighting is on automatic sensors. Others thought that the landscaping work is a bit untidy and is already looking in need of maintenance. On balance though, we did feel that the car park provided as good a visual interest as any of the other buildings in Frederick Street and definitely contributed to a revived vitality in the area. The improvement to the public realm is significant.

Crimmond and Fitzroy – 44 and 46 Culter House Road

In 2013 we recognised with an award a property called Astoria in Culter House Road.

Well, these are two houses right next door to Astoria. They are a pair of new houses sitting next to each other like twins, both sharing a similar design.

Here again the wooded landscape makes a huge contribution. The awards committee thought that the buildings were very good. The sizes, their shape and the relationship of the amount of glass to the amount of wall was all well balanced. They are houses, but they could equally have been offices.

Some members of the committee felt that the designs were probably not quite as strong as Astoria next door. On the plus side the designs look generous, open and spacious, just as you would have expected. The relationship of the two houses together, the landscape, with Astoria next door, and with other properties along Culter House Road all worked very well.

North East Scotland College, Gallowgate – re-cladding

The existing North East Scotland College buildings, which are bounded by Gallowgate, Loch Street and Spring Garden, have had a makeover. This was no doubt prompted by a desire to improve heat efficiency.

However, in doing this the appearance of the buildings have actually been improved, so much so that we had to consider it as part of our awards this year.

We are delighted that North East Scotland College has invested money into the existing buildings in the centre of Aberdeen. Students provide a real buzz about the place and encouraging them to remain in the centre of the city is important. I am sure it would have been easy for the College to de-camp out of their city centre site but instead they have stayed put and made a strong commitment to it.

The former buildings were a bit drab. But the re-cladding work that has taken place looks good. It improves the way that the building looks and it all seems to work well in its context. It is neither overly flashy nor dull. It is just a significant improvement to our built environment, which is something that is at the heart of what Aberdeen Civic Society strives to do.

To have done all this work while at the same time continuing to use the site for students must have been a challenge at times, but we applaud this investment in the centre of our city. Well done.

And the graphic on the side is pretty good too!

Contributed by Dominic Fairlie.