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Newsletter No. 87: September 2014

Coming Events

Wednesday 26th November 2014: the Scottish Civic Trust and the Future of Civic Society; an illustrated talk by John Pelan, Director of the Scottish Civic Trust. At the Royal Northern & University Club, No. 9 Albyn Place, at 7.30 for 8 pm.

Aberdeen Civic Society 2014 Award Winners

The Society takes great pleasure each year in recognising buildings and developments in Aberdeen that have enhanced or preserved the civic amenity of our City with our annual awards. 2014 has been another excellent year that has provided us with myriad options to consider. As usual the Awards Sub-Committee has deliberated long and hard and eventually reached consensus on our winners. We will elaborate further on the award winners, commendations and mentions in the next edition, however we thought we'd print the winners here in this edition which is going to press just days before the ceremony itself.

We are pleased to announce that we have two headline awards. The first is being bestowed on the Prime 4 development at Kingswells, owned by Drum Property Group, designed by Halliday Fraser Munro and constructed by Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd. The second is the Aberdeen Aquatics Centre in King Street, owned by Aberdeen Sports Village, designed by Faulkner Browns Architects and constructed by Graham Construction. Congratulations to all finalists. In our next edition we will explain why we thought that these excellent developments deserved our highest recognition.

As has become customary in recent years we are also giving an Award for Craftsmanship and this year our winner is Ho Ho Designs for their splendid work on replacement windows for 44a Rubislaw Den South.

We are all eagerly looking forward to seeing what next year will bring us!

Some Recent Planning Applications of Note

Nos. 13-14 Adelphi, the former Trades Club or TUC Club: a proposal for alteration, partial demolition and change of use to create five residential flats.

Dyce, the Business Park: a proposal for a 175-bedroomed hotel.

Union Glen: a proposal for demolition of the existing industrial units and erection of an 'Apart-hotel' of 71 room suites, also parking & landscaping.

Dyce, the Business Park: application for various works in relation to the construction of a 156-bedroomed hotel.

Former Craighill Primary School: a proposal for a residential development of 75 'affordable' properties.

Former Smithfield Primary School: a proposal for a residential development of 116 'affordable' properties.

Former Tillydrone Primary School, also St Machar Primary School and the former Aberdon House: a proposal for 184-270 'affordable' residential properties.

Wallace Tower, Tillydrone: a proposal for change of use and an extension to this former residential property, to form a new community café and community and office accommodation.

No. 54 Park Road: a proposal for the demolition of the existing buildings and erection of a residential development of 174 flats.

Nos. 25-29 Queen's Road: a proposal for change of use from the present flatted properties to a development of 18 serviced apartments, to include a 3-storey rear extension and associated ground works.

Nigg Caravan Park, Altens Farm Road: a proposal for the erection of a 3-storey office building.

Kingswells: a proposal for the erection of Pavilion 4, to include retail, financial & professional services, food & drink, offices, hot food & takeaway.

Comments On The Marischal Square Development

A Brief Summary

We expect everyone reading this will be aware that plans were lodged with the Council's Planning Department by Muse Developments earlier this year detailing their development proposal for the former St Nicholas House site in the heart of the City Centre. The Committee commented on this application urging a re-think of the density and massing of the proposal to better reflect its surroundings. Our Chairman,

Dominic Fairlie, was invited to elaborate on our comment during the public hearing that was much publicised. Below is an extract from his talk which we think nicely summarises our concerns:

The Civic Society has studied the proposals by MUSE for the re-development of the St Nicholas House site. We have to say we are disappointed with these proposals as they currently stand, for one of the most prominent, important and central parts of the city. Other cities in the UK seem to have the ability to value and build on their existing heritage, but here in Aberdeen we seem to do the opposite. What is so disappointing is that we can actually do good things. Aberdeen City Council has made a great job of bringing Marischal College back into use, but these proposals for the replacement of St Nicholas House, in which the Council retains an involvement as the owner of the land, fail to respect the existing buildings of Marischal College, Provost Skene's House and the built elevations to Upperkirkgate. Crucially, the proposals do not even respect adopted Council policies for the development of the site, policies that have been through intense public scrutiny. We therefore object to the application.

In particular, we object to the scale of the proposed development. Despite some adjustments made as the application went through its public consultation phase, we feel the overall density, massing and scale of the development is still too overpowering, bearing in mind the site's important location and its surroundings. Our comments relate specifically to the box-like appearance that is probably three storeys too high and lacks the variation and interest that is so characteristic of Aberdeen's existing skyline. The whole development needs to be more human in scale and should take its place and setting from the buildings around it - the elevations, form, scale and massing of Marischal College and Upperkirkgate - buildings that tend to punctuate the skyline of Aberdeen rather than flatten it with a large horizontal roof structure.

In summary, we do not have a problem with the principle of development on this site, but we feel that the existing proposals do little to bring out and celebrate its historic surroundings. We have grave concerns about the scale and bulk of the proposed design. We feel that more could be done to improve Flourmill Lane and access to Provost Skene's House. We remain to be convinced about the proposed pedestrianisation of Broad Street. We would appreciate it if these points were taken into account in the Council's and Scottish Government's decision-making on this proposal.

Just as we were about to send this newsletter to print, news emerged that the Planning Application for Marischal Square was passed at a full meeting of the Aberdeen City Council by a margin of 23 – 18 with work scheduled to commence in February next year.

The Watcher In The Shadows

On Thursday 31st August, Diane Morgan and myself were in Union Terrace Gardens to receive the Judges for Britain In Bloom on behalf of the Friends of Union Terrace Gardens. It was a cold, dark and rainy day. We took a good look around and made a point of checking the progress of the rhododendrons planted at the south end, in the shadow of Union Bridge, and also the state of the old railway turntable down below. Then we walked up to the designated meet-up place just below the statue of Rabbin Burns.

The Judges duly arrived for their flying visit, being shown around the city by a representative of Aberdeen Inspired, and all very pleasant and friendly. We were able to point out the new light fittings, birds' nesting boxes up in the trees, benches, bulb plantings, shrubs, pointing on stonework and painting of railings. After 15-20 minutes the Judges departed for their next inspection.

We have since received a very positive review of the Gardens and the work achieved by the ACC gardeners and by volunteers. The odd thing is that according to the Judges, they were received by and spoke to three people from Friends of Union Terrace Gardens - their guide from Aberdeen Inspired was definite about this - leaving Diane and myself wondering who this other party might have been. We saw no-one else in the general vicinity. It had been a cold, dark day, rather to our disappointment, because the Gardens would have appeared to better effect on a sunny day and there would have been more people around. Something of a 'Woman In Black' situation? Some ghostly revenant from way back? Who knows?

Contributed by Alex Mitchell.

Online

A reminder to all that this newsletter, and other communications from the Society, can now be sent digitally to those who prefer to reduce their carbon footprint by minimising the amount of paper we use and the amount of miles their post has to travel. If you would prefer to receive your copy in your email please get in touch with us at info@aberdeencivicsociety.org.uk.

You can also follow us on twitter @Abdn_Civ_Soc or search for us on Facebook.