

Development Management Sub-Committee Report

Wednesday 1 March 2023

**Application for Conservation Area Consent
Centrum House, 108 - 114 & 116 Dundas Street, Edinburgh**

Proposal: Complete demolition in a conservation area.

**Item – Other Item at Committee
Application Number – 22/05884/CON
Ward – B05 - Inverleith**

Reasons for Referral to Committee

The proposed demolition affects buildings on a sensitive site within the New Town Conservation Area around which there are several listed buildings and there is an associated application for planning permission that has received more than six objections. Therefore, the application must be determined by the Development Management Sub Committee due to being of significant public interest.

Recommendation

It is recommended that this application be **Granted** subject to the details below.

Summary

The demolition of the existing building is acceptable in terms of Section 66 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 and the interim HES guidance.

SECTION A – Application Background

Site Description

The application relates to a site measuring approximately 0.167 hectares in area located at the north-west corner of Dundas Street and Fettes Row, bounded by Henderson Place to the rear (west).

The existing buildings on site comprises two adjoining office blocks: 108-114 Dundas Street 116 Dundas Street, dating from the 1980s. Both blocks are seven storeys high in total with a combined internal floor area of approximately 4,600sqm and two below ground levels including a car park with 35 spaces at basement level.

Several category B listed buildings are in proximity to the site, the nearest being the adjacent buildings to the south at 13-24 Fettes Row (inclusive numbers) and 104 and 106 Dundas Street (reference LB28755, listed on 10 November 1966). The other listed buildings are on the opposite corner to the site at 1-12 Fettes Row (inclusive numbers) and 99-103 Dundas Street (reference LB28754, listed on 15 July 1965), 87-97A Dundas Street (reference LB28712, listed on 13 September 1964) and 79-85 Dundas Street and 34B Cumberland Street (reference LB28711, listed on 13 September 1964). All these buildings are category B listed.

The site is within the New Town Conservation Area and the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site boundary runs adjacent to the southern edge of the site.

The former Royal Bank of Scotland offices occupy the corner site opposite on the east side of Dundas Street and north side of Fettes Row. A recent residential development at 120 Dundas Street, built around 15 years ago, adjoins the site to the north and there are residential flats to the north-west of the site on Henderson Row.

The site is mainly level, with a gradual rise from north to south up Dundas Street. There are nine street trees located within the hard landscaping of the basement lightwell to the front of the buildings which is enclosed by a plinth with railings. The land to the rear of the site comprises a tarmac car park and the north boundary is marked by a residential block and its communal garden wall.

Description of the Proposal

The application is for the demolition of the existing buildings on the site comprises two adjoining office blocks: 108-114 Dundas Street 116 Dundas Street, dating from the 1980s.

An associated application for planning permission has been submitted for the demolition of the existing buildings on the site and erection of a mixed-use development comprising 49 flats, including 12 affordable units, with three commercial units in Class 1 (retail), 2 (office) and 3 (café/restaurant) uses at ground and lower ground level, private and communal amenity space, landscaping and basement level car and cycle parking (application number 22/05886/FUL).

Supporting Information

- Heritage Statement
- Planning Statement
- Design and Access Statement; and
- Tree Survey and Report

Relevant Site History

20/05645/FUL
Centrum House
108 - 114 Dundas Street
Edinburgh

Proposed demolition of existing office buildings and erection of a mixed-use development comprising 50 flats with 3 commercial units (Class 1, 2 and 3 uses), amenity space, landscaping, basement level car and cycle parking and other associated infrastructure (as amended).

Refused

7 October 2021

20/05646/CON

Centrum House

108 - 114 And 116 Dundas Street

Edinburgh

Complete demolition of existing buildings

Refused

7 October 2021

Other Relevant Site History

Pre-Application process

Pre-application discussions took place on this application.

Consultation Engagement

Historic Environment Scotland

Archaeologist

Refer to Appendix 1 for a summary of the consultation response.

Publicity and Public Engagement

Date of Neighbour Notification: Not Applicable

Date of Renotification of Neighbour Notification: Not Applicable

Press Publication Date(s): 9 December 2022

Site Notices Date(s): 6 December 2022

Number of Contributors: 30

Section B - Assessment

Determining Issues

Consent is required because section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 (the "1997 Heritage Act") states that in making a decision on the demolition of a building in a conservation area section 6 to 25 of the same Act shall have effect in relation to buildings in conservation areas as they have effect in relation to listed buildings. The proposals therefore require to be assessed in terms of Section 64 of the 1997 Heritage Act:

- Having due regard to HES Policy and guidance, does the proposed demolition conflict with the objective of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area?

- If the proposals do comply with HES Policy and guidance on demolition in a conservation area, are there any compelling reasons (including but not limited to the public sector equality duty) for not approving them?
- If the proposals do not comply with HES Policy and guidance on demolition in a conservation area, are there any compelling reasons (including but not limited to the public sector equality duty) for approving them?

Assessment

To address these determining issues, it needs to be considered whether:

a) Demolition of buildings and replacement

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 states that in making a decision on the demolition of a building in a conservation area, certain provisions of the same Act shall have effect in relation to buildings in conservation areas as they have effect in relation to listed buildings.

Historic Environment Scotland's Interim Guidance on the Designation of Conservation Areas and Conservation Area Consent (April 2019) outlines criteria to assess the acceptability of the demolition of unlisted buildings within conservation area, including:

- *the importance of the building to the character or appearance of any part of the conservation area, and of proposals for the future of the cleared site.*
- *if the building is considered to be of any value, either in itself or as part of a group, a positive attempt should always be made by the planning authority to achieve its retention, restoration, and sympathetic conversion to some other compatible use before proposals to demolish are seriously investigated.*
- *where demolition may be thought appropriate, for example, if the building is of little townscape value, if its structural condition rules out its retention at reasonable cost, or if its form or location makes its re-use extremely difficult, consent to demolish should be given only where there are acceptable proposals for the new building.*

The existing buildings sit on prominent corner towards the northern edge of the New Town Conservation Area. The south side of Fettes Row/Royal Crescent represents the northern most expansion of the Second New Town in its completed form. The corner blocks within Dundas Street form a visual 'gateway' into the Second New Town from the north.

The character of the south side of Fettes Row is that of a planned classical style residential development built in blonde Craigleith sandstone, dating from the 1820s, with the key characteristics of a monumental palace block with unifying symmetrical and rhythmic elevational treatment, no projecting elements in the wall planes and shallow roof pitches and slightly advanced terminal pavilions that are a storey higher.

The monumental palace designs of the east-west streets of the Second New Town were not possible to achieve on its steep south-north slopes, so the buildings on these streets are mostly tenement blocks. Whilst there is regularity and symmetry within the blocks, they step down as on Dundas Street as emphasised by the eaves and cornice.

The corner blocks of the east-west streets facing Dundas Street are usually on a level and of the same height (for example, in Great King Street). In order to deal with the Dundas Street slope, some east-west streets did not include terminal pavilion blocks, such as Cumberland and Northumberland Streets and the downwards 'step' continues on the north side of the street.

In contrast, the current and previous buildings on this site have not formed part of any planned development, although a residential development was planned for the area between Fettes Row and Henderson Row, probably by William Burn in the 1820s. Only a small part of this scheme was built, and the remainder of the area became occupied by an assortment of light industrial buildings constructed in the later 19th century and replaced by the current offices in the 1980s.

The existing buildings forming Centrum House form part of a small group of early 1980's structures of corporate character that are at odds with their predominantly residential context. BUPA house and Centrum House were design by Ian Burke Associates. The group includes the former Royal Bank of Scotland Computer Centre by Michael Laird and Partners, dating from 1978 on the opposite side of Dundas Street and Fettes Row, the subject of a recently granted application for conservation area consent to demolish the building (reference 20/03661/CON). "The Buildings of Scotland: Edinburgh" by Gifford, McWilliam and Walker, 1985 describes Centrum House and its adjoining office BUPA House as parodies of the RBS Computer Centre.

Some features of the buildings are unsympathetic to their location, particularly in terms of building lines design and landscaping. On Dundas Street, the two buildings are set back approximately 9.5 metres from the building line of the recent flatted block at No. 120. Whilst this line equates to that of the RBS Computer Centre opposite, it does not relate to the historic building line of the late Victorian tenements at 122-160 Dundas Street, nor to the Second New Town tenements at 78-106 Dundas Street. The mansard roofs are out of character with the shallow-pitch roofs of the listed Georgian buildings and later tenements.

The existing structures on the site are not without merit in terms of the setback building line on Fettes Row, natural sandstone frontages and inclusion of modern interpretations of traditional features, including basement lightwells, entrance platts and boundary railings. However, they are not particularly sensitive to the particular character of this part of the New Town Conservation Area in terms of their relationship to the nearby listed tenements and should not provide design precedents for any replacement buildings.

It should be noted that in the appeal decision for the previous application for conservation area consent, the Reporter concludes that the existing buildings do not contribute to the special character and appearance of the conservation area.

A condition is recommended to ensure that the buildings are not demolished before a detailed scheme has been granted and the Notification of Initiation of Development has been received with a start date for the detailed development.

Conclusion in relation to the demolition and replacement

The demolition of the existing building is therefore acceptable in terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 and the interim HES guidance.

b) The proposals harm the character or appearance of the conservation area.

The New Town Conservation Area Character Appraisal identifies the key characteristics of the Second New Town as:

- *grand formal streets lined by fine terraced buildings expressing neo-classical order, regularity, symmetry, rigid geometry, and a hierarchical arrangement of buildings and spaces with controlled vistas and planned views.*
- *the generally uniform height ensuring that the skyline is distinct and punctuated only by church spires, steeples, and monuments; and*
- *the important feature of terminated vistas within the grid layouts and the long-distance views across and out of the conservation area.*

As detailed in the assessment for the parallel planning application (reference 22/05886/FUL), the demolition of these buildings would enable the development of the site in a coherent and positive way. The replacement hard and soft landscaping is appropriately designed and specified in terms of the overall characteristics of the site.

Conclusion in relation to the conservation area

The proposals are acceptable in terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997.

c) there are any other matters to consider.

The following matters have been identified for consideration:

Archaeological remains

The site is within an area associated with medieval industry and farming, but it is highly likely that the construction of the 1980's office blocks removed any significant archaeology across the site, so the development will have no adverse impact on any important remains.

Equalities and human rights

Due regard has been given to section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010. The demolition of the buildings will enable the formation of improved access routes into the site and its facilities for people with mobility issues.

Consideration has been given to human rights. No impacts have been identified through the assessment and no comments have been received in relation to human rights.

Public representations

material objections

- Centrum House represents a specific time and style which should be preserved, adapted, and reused to maintain the history of the street and preserve the conservation area.

support comments

- the removal of the existing buildings will preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area; and
- the existing buildings have no existing features worthy of retention.

non-material comments

The majority of comments, including those from the New Town and Broughton Community Council (NTBCC), relate to the associated application for planning permission (reference 22/05886/FUL) or are non-material in planning terms.

Conclusion in relation to other matters considered

The proposals do not raise any concerns in relation to other material considerations identified.

Overall conclusion

The demolition of the existing building is acceptable in terms of Section 66 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 and the interim HES guidance.

Section C - Conditions/Reasons/Informatives

The recommendation is subject to the following.

Conditions

1. No demolition shall start until the applicant has confirmed in writing the start date for the new development by the submission of a Notice of Initiation of Development for planning permission application reference 22/05886/FUL.

Reasons

1. In order to safeguard the character of the conservation area.

Informatives

It should be noted that:

1. The works hereby permitted shall be commenced no later than the expiration of three years from the date of this consent.

Background Reading/External References

To view details of the application go to the [Planning Portal](#)

Further Information - Local Development Plan

Date Registered: 22 November 2022

Drawing Numbers/Scheme

01, 02A + 03A

Scheme 1

David Givan
Chief Planning Officer
PLACE
The City of Edinburgh Council

Contact: Clare Macdonald, Senior Planning Officer
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Appendix 1

Summary of Consultation Responses

NAME: Historic Environment Scotland

COMMENT: No comments to make on the proposals.

DATE: 12 December 2022

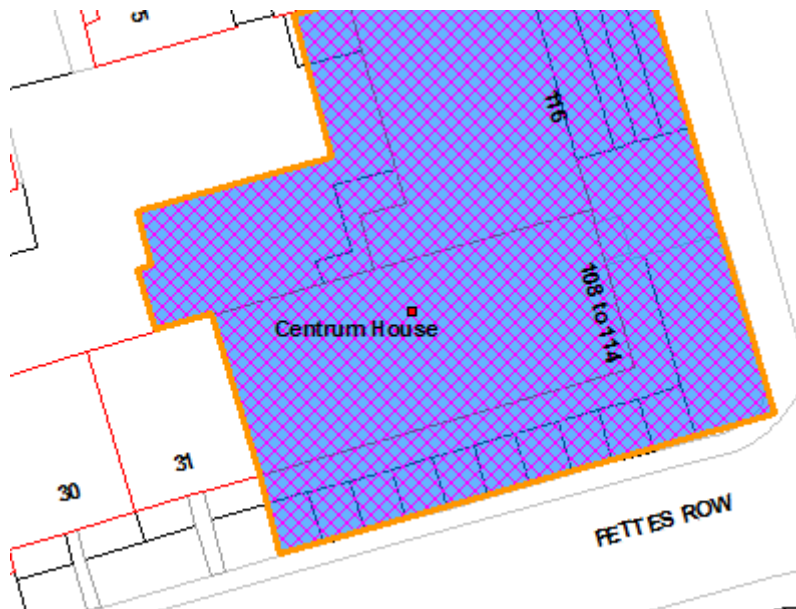
NAME: Archaeologist

COMMENT: No known, significant, archaeological implications regarding this application.

DATE: 6 December 2022

The full consultation response can be viewed on the [Planning & Building Standards Portal](#).

Location Plan



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