

Concerning the Future of Edinburgh's Central Library and the City's World Heritage Status

We the undersigned, backed by over [5000 signatures of public support](#), wish to register an expression of “**No Confidence**” in the City of Edinburgh Council, in response to the proposal for a highly contentious development at India Buildings on Victoria Street, following a spate of controversial planning decisions whose cumulative effects are **seriously damaging** the reputation of this City of the Enlightenment, putting Edinburgh's **highest accolade** at risk, the [World Heritage status](#).

Previously, in early 2014, thousands objected to the speculative Caltongate/ New Waverley development, whose form now speaks for itself, so out of keeping with Edinburgh's Old Town. Numerous other major planning controversies have since emerged such as the Royal High School, South St Andrew Square, St James Centre etc, which have put great strain on communities and undermined public faith in the planning process.

The case of [India Buildings](#) is the latest controversy, one of seven developments the International Council on Monuments and Sites has voiced '**strong concerns**', believing that a '**serious investigation is merited**'.

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, holds the **government ultimately responsible for the care of World Heritage** and warns there is an “**ongoing threat**” to Edinburgh's world heritage status, stating:

*“Regrettably the current situation... appears to have tipped the balance inappropriately, away from conservation, towards **inappropriate development**. There is an **urgent need to reconsider, revise and re-frame current approaches to development**... so as to deliver greater focus on values, to incorporate appropriate expertise and to **improve engagement with the community**.”*

The Old Town community consider the case of the India Buildings as blatantly representing '**inappropriate development**', regarding the Council's planning report to have been '**significantly flawed**'.*

Contrary to the report, which claims “*the design of the new building is respectful*”, local residents consider the proposed development will have a **massive detrimental impact** on the Old Town, which already endures **excessive congestion, noise, and air pollution**, in breach of regulations.

With a Council heavily in debt due to a litany of maladministration (trams, PFI schools, statutory repairs etc), and contending with the imposition of 'austerity' caused by the chicanery of the global banking system, Edinburgh Council is currently sanctioning the asset stripping of the City, **without any public consent or consultation to determine alternative options**.

The proposed India Buildings 'development' involves the disposal of significant public assets, including the historic B listed Cowgatehead Church, which has been used as an NHS clinic for many years, serving the needs of the **most vulnerable in the community**. Against the wishes of staff and patrons, the clinic would be relocated and the church converted to an entertainment venue integrated into the hotel, adding to the over-provision of licensed venues that encourage the late night anti-social behaviour that has impinged so much on the quality of life of local residents in recent years.

Most controversially, the proposed hotel would extend to the Cowgate on public land long set aside for the benefit of the City and the Central Library, to re-vision this key public asset as a major cultural hub and literary centre, in recognition of Edinburgh's title as the **first UNESCO World City of Literature**.

With the original building reaching capacity, this vital land would safeguard the Library's future and honour the aspiration of founder, Scots born Andrew Carnegie, (whose remarkable legacy established many thousands of public libraries throughout the World), who desired that the Central Library, “*grow in usefulness, and prove one of the most **potent agencies for the good of the people of Edinburgh for all time to come***”.

Were the hotel to be built, the bulk of the building would **significantly overshadow** the Library, reducing natural light by up to **80%**. For a building regarded as the **finest Carnegie library in the country**, this would be an appalling indictment for such an importance building: a beacon of The Enlightenment, purposely designed to maximise natural light, whose motto above the main entrance proclaims, “**Let There Be Light**”!

As an alternative proposal, awakened by the temerity of the [hotel developer](#), the local community, backed by thousands of signatures in support of the petition "[Let There Be Light In Edinburgh's Old Town](#)", wish to acquire and develop the public assets using the Community Empowerment Act and crowd funding, realising the original aspirations of the Central Library and the legacy of Carnegie.

All local councillors have voiced strong objections to the proposed hotel, underscored by the local MP who has recently expressed '**serious concerns**', asking for a thorough reconsideration of the application.

In upholding integrity and honouring the primary duty of acting in the best interests of Citizens, We remind the Council of the pledge that was made to at the beginning of the current term of office:

*"We... need to recognise that **there has been a breakdown in trust between the residents of Edinburgh and their elected representatives on the Council**. That relationship needs to be repaired... this new contract with the capital marks a fresh start, with a Council **willing to listen to local people and work together with local communities...** A council where **co-operation, fairness, accountability and responsibility really matter**. The City will be able to judge the Council against this promise".*

In light of the case of India Buildings, We judge that the Council has betrayed its promise, and having lost faith in the local authority Ministers at the Scottish Parliament have now been approached but have declined to intervene, stating "*there are **no issues of national significance** that would justify using the power of call-in in this particular case*" and would "*only consider intervening in cases that raised issues of **genuine national** as opposed to local interest.*"

In recognising that one of the most important public buildings in the country is under considerable threat, together with the World Heritage status and indeed the very future of the living community of this ancient neighbourhood at the heart of the Nation, now in 'perilous decline' due to cumulative commercial pressures, We the undersigned resolutely contend that this matter is of the utmost "**genuine national**" significance.

For a government committed to "*empower individuals and communities*", We therefore respectfully ask the Scottish Government to make an **exceptional intervention** in support of **community empowerment** and the realisation of a brilliant, 'once in a civilisation' opportunity, of enriching this City of Literature & Enlightenment.

This alternative aspiration for the Central Library would invigorate the '*potent agency*' of an institution representing among the highest attainment of modern civilisation, helping to redefine and reaffirm the essential relevance of the public library service as a beacon for learning, literature, culture and excellence, at the centre of the community, for the benefit of all, "*for all time to come*".

For the Love of Edina, "Let There Be Light",

Signed,

November 2016

* Besides not adequately addressing the many issues of objection, the report contained insufficient, misleading and contradictory information. Moreover, **key information** recently obtained through Freedom of Information requests was withheld from the report which would have otherwise **undoubtedly influenced the decision to award planning consent for the proposed hotel**.

This relates to the listing of the Central Library which had been recommended for upgrade to **Category A in 2002**, to afford **greater protection** to the building and recognition of its national, and indeed international, significance.

Though this recommendation was endorsed by the Council in 2005, the Central Library remained a B listed building and was only upgraded **AFTER** planning consent had been granted to the proposed hotel; a clear conflict of interest and dereliction of duty of the Council.



Proposed hotel abutting Central Library at Cowgate.

"A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never failing spring in the desert. There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library; this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration." - Andrew Carnegie