

# Fears for world famous 'Greek' Thomson



■ This picture of the Egyptian Halls, left, nine years ago gives an idea of their former splendour, but they are now hidden by hoardings, inset right. As our main picture shows, the halls are covered in scaffolding and Derek Souter fears for the future Pictures: Colin Mearns



# £2.3m plea for historic city 'icon'

**EXCLUSIVE**  
By VIVIANNE NICOLL

**A** HISTORIC building in Glasgow city centre may have to be demolished ... unless £2.35million can be found to save it.

The 138-year-old A-Listed Egyptian Halls in Union Street, opposite the side entrance to Central Station, were designed by Alexander "Greek" Thomson and are regarded as one of the finest buildings in Glasgow.

The building has lain empty and partly derelict for 30 years and is now hidden behind scaffolding and a giant hoarding.

Owner Derek Souter, director of Union Street Properties, invited the Evening Times to tour the impressive structure. What we found was a building crying out for attention, with plaster falling off the walls and ceilings, and decades of neglect evident round every corner.

Mr Souter said: "I believe the building is very close to being unable to be repaired, which would mean it

would eventually become dangerous." If that happened, it is almost certain the Egyptian Halls would have to be demolished and the site cleared.

Neil Baxter, secretary of the Royal Incorporation Of Architects in Scotland, said: "There is no question that the Egyptian Halls is the finest surviving example of an Alexander Thomson commercial building."

"This is a building of the first international importance and it would be a great pity if lack of a relatively small amount of money in terms of public expenditure, condemned this building."

Mr Souter admits he is frustrated that the Scottish Government, through Historic Scotland, has given large grants to other projects but - he claims - is refusing to give enough to save an architectural gem.

He said: "This is a 200-job project, in a street that needs regenerating, in a city that needs every job it can get."

"It is a fantastic location, but it is a street that has never had any regeneration, which is such a pity."

"Central Station has 27million passengers a year, but Union Street has

nothing on it to make people stop before they go on to the station."

Work on the halls started in March 1870 and the building was completed in 1872. It was apparently built in emulation of the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly.

Mr Souter first got involved with the former market in 1998 when he bought the first of the four shops at street level and has been fighting to save the building ever since.

Because of ownership issues, he did not purchase the upper four floors until 2008.

He wants to upgrade the shops and transform the rest of the building into a 136-bed hotel in a project costing around £24million.

The Accor group, which operates 850 hotels in nearly 100 countries, is keen to get involved and take up the hotel franchise.

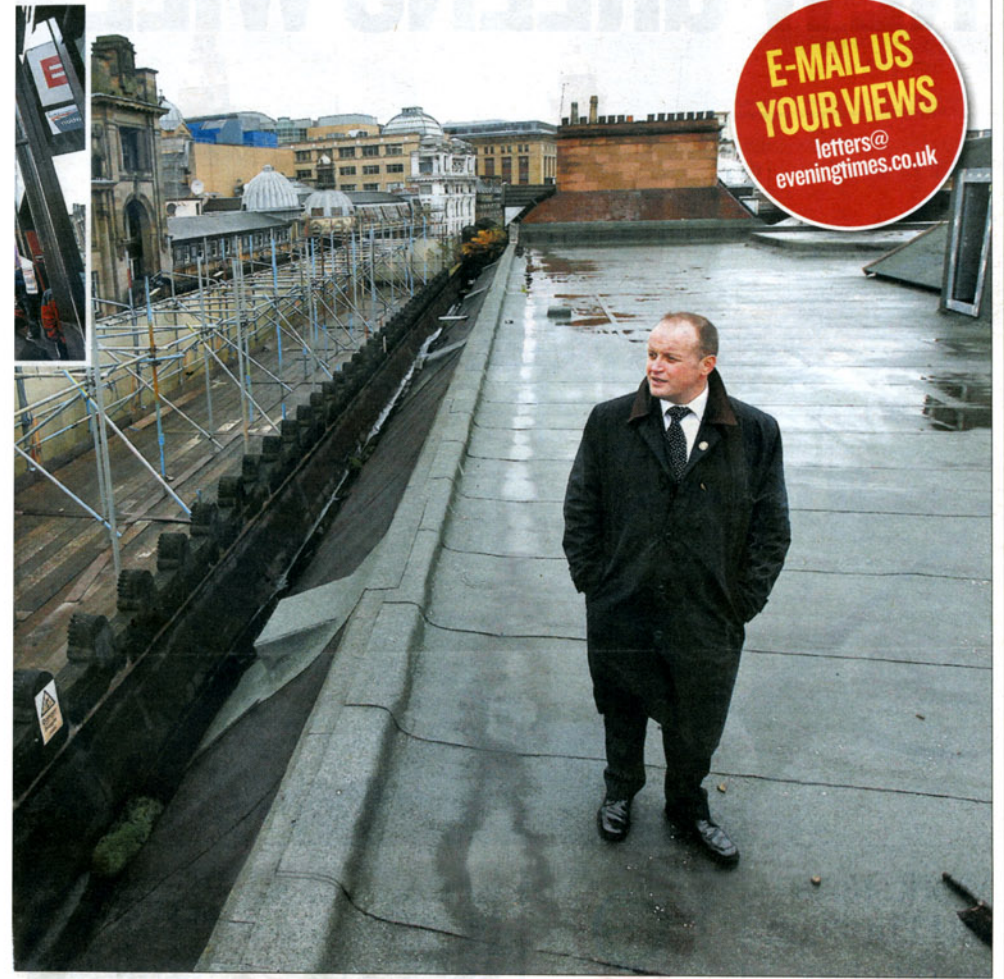


If the hotel became a reality, it would create 200 jobs, help regenerate Union Street and result in around £300,000 a year in business rates being paid to the council.

But there is one major problem - lack of money.

Union Street Properties and sister company Union Street Investments have so far spent £5m on the project and Mr Souter says they are willing to invest a further £12m.

# building as owner fights to save it



**“ This place is special on a world stage and worthy of support from every direction**

The city council has agreed a £1m grant and Historic Scotland a grant of around £1.65m, leaving about £4.35m still to be found before work can start.

Mr Souter says his firms are prepared to fund a further £2m but wants the Scottish Government to provide the remaining £2.35m. He pointed out it recently awarded Abbotsford House, the Melrose home of Sir Walter Scott, a grant of £4m.

He added: "We have shouldered all the risks with this project for 12 years because we will not make any money from it for next five and 10 years."

**I**F THE money cannot be found, the halls would be mothballed, resulting in it deteriorating further and eventually having to be flattened.

But Mr Souter believes transforming the Egyptian Halls would breathe life into Union Street and start the regeneration of the area.

He said: "The Halls are a massive part of Glasgow's cultural heritage but have been allowed to atrophy and decline."

"What do you do with a culturally iconic building if it cannot be repaired because it has been allowed to deteriorate to such an extent?"

"The signs for the winter to come are for a severe one and this will do nothing but increase the physical challenges the Egyptian Halls are facing."

John Addison, who is consulting structural and conservation engineer to the Egyptian Halls, project also

believes the building should be saved. His other projects include the Britannia Panopticon Music Hall, Cottier Theatre, Gartnavel Hospital Royal Chapel and the Trades House Of Glasgow.

He said of the Egyptian Halls: "This place is special on a world stage and worthy of support from every direction."

"Its' Category A historic status means it is a cultural asset for all society for all time - and that is running out."

Historic Scotland insists it will not be able to provide any more than the £1.5m it has already pledged towards the renovation work.

Martin Fairley, Historic Scotland's head of investments and projects, said: "We have offered three times the usual award maximum to assist in the repair of Egyptian Halls."

"We are incredibly supportive of the efforts to save this important building, but have to be realistic about what Historic Scotland can provide in this commercial project."

vivienne.nicoll@eveningtimes.co.uk