

Demolishing Egyptian Halls is last straw in 30-year development plan

Published on 10 May 2011

Union Street Properties (USP) has been forced to apply to demolish the Egyptian Halls in Union Street, Glasgow, because we cannot fund the Listed Building Repairs Notice (LBRN), which is a legally binding obligation.

An LBRN cannot be varied once it has been served (“Threat to demolish historic Greek Thomson building”, The Herald, May 5 and Letters, May 6). The near-£10 million deficit cannot be funded in the present commercial market, due to the absence of speculative funding and the 80% crash in property values on Union Street. An alternative solution is required.

USP cannot survive with the threat of the LBRN hanging over it. If it was removed there would not be a statutory duty to discharge it. The application to demolish focuses on the financial non-viability of the scheme, which would see the LBRN discharged and a 200-room hotel created. The latter does not relate to or concern USP.

The application to demolish follows to the letter Scottish Historic Environment policy and, according to the criteria laid down USP, qualifies on at least three of the four grounds.

I also have to state this is a 30-plus years problem which has come to a head. It’s bad timing for all stakeholders: Glasgow City Council, Historic Scotland, the Scottish Government, USP and Union Street Investments (USI). A decade ago the deficit would have been £3m. If I was in favour of demolition I’d not be taking to the streets of Glasgow to get signatures for a petition.

To preserve the Egyptian Halls and return it to commercial sustainability the new Scottish Government needs to engage with both USP and USI. No developer in these challenging times can expect any form of a blank cheque. A collaborative private/public sector project can still be implemented; one which is self-financing, accountable and transparent and would see the Scottish Government offered a share of any windfall profits, if they should accrue.

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