

POINTS OF VIEW

Politicians – do more!

IN YOUR OPINION

WHILE it is encouraging to hear Humza Yousaf in Monday's Evening Times acknowledge that people with learning disabilities are the worst affected by UK Government spending cuts and Glasgow City Council's slashing of services – that is not enough.

We need much more from MPs, MSPs and councillors.

A good starting point would be a national conversation that includes vulnerable people and their carers, however, not simply to discuss how poorly they are being treated under current incumbents.

A more meaningful aspiration would include how we can reverse these cuts and move forward to deal with Glasgow's care crisis.

Tommy Gorman, via email

Taking wrong stand

RE putting a standing area back at Celtic Park, what a regressive step.

We've had decades of stadia improvement – supporter safety is now paramount and we have more comfortable stadia than ever before and yet Celtic want to go back to the bad old days.

Then again, Celtic had to be forced by law to modernise Parkhead in the first place, so it's perhaps not surprising that they seek to undo this work.

William Connelly, posted online

Critics – sit down

STANDING at football matches could be safer: surely a safe standing area is far better for people who want to stand than

PICTURE OF THE DAY



Reader Tony Kelly from Milngavie took this photo of a family of swans making their way along the Forth and Clyde canal

E-mail your images to yourpics@eveningtimes.co.uk if you have a picture you would like to share with readers. Follow us on Twitter @EveningTimesPic

people tripping over plastic seats at knee height.

David Neil William Connelly, posted online

Cycle lanes no-go

I WAS reading about a call for cycles lane on every street, but many of the roads are unsuitable for cycle lanes.

The city infrastructure is too old.

Cyclists don't feel safe when all there is between themselves and faster moving cars is a white line.

Drivers don't like it either, and the last thing a driver wants is to hit a cyclist.

There is a high risk of serious injury or death.

Bumping another car is bad enough but at least bones don't get broken.

I had a discussion with a cycling officer at the council before and he

said that even where there is space to do so reclaiming pavement simply not economically feasible or close to impossible.

The reason is the routing of the sewers at the road edges.

They need to be at the edge for drainage, so how would that work if the pavements were just pulled back.

Garry Cornes, via Facebook

IN OUR OPINION

We must protect our heritage

HALLS - P6/7

GLASGOW is renowned for its architecture.

Every year thousands of tourists visit Scotland's largest city to admire buildings designed by some of the world's foremost architects including Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Alexander 'Greek' Thomson.

Last year's fire at the Glasgow School of Art – which devastated both the building and the city – was a reminder that those buildings are both vulnerable and irreplaceable.

Today's feature on the famous Egyptian Halls makes for sad reading.

Designed by Alexander 'Greek' Thomson, the owners of the 142-year-old building say it is now on its last legs.

They were dealt a major blow this month with the refusal of a £5 million lottery bid they had hoped could kick-start a long overdue renovation for the Union Street building.

Dundee-based businessman Derek Souter said he had met with no less than 64 people from Glasgow City Council in a bid to secure funding to help restore the building to its former glory.

The council says it is hopeful that a solution may be found at some point to fully redevelop the building.

However, time is running out for the Egyptian Halls.

It is crucial that funding bodies, the city council and the owners of such buildings work together so that future generations can continue to take pride in Glasgow's architectural heritage.

IN HER OPINION

RACHEL

HOLIDAY season is upon us. I can tell because our

came into force in Magaluf which aim to change the holiday favourite's reputation for rowdy nightlife.

though? After the well-publicised measures came into effect, tourists were still spilling out of bars holding their drinks and boasting

up to when they escape to the sun.

Jay falling asleep outside the hotel and being eaten alive by ants, Neil's dance routines, fighting between

especially when it comes to safety.

The resort is trying to stamp out 'balconing', the craze of jumping from hotel balconies.

The problem is that it's not

Ferry workforce ready to take industrial action

RMT members at ferry operator CalMac have voted for strike action and action short of a strike, according to the union.

The maritime union issued ballot papers to hundreds of its members last month in a dispute over jobs, pensions and working conditions.

Members voted by 92% for strike action and by 98% for action short of a strike in a turnout of 60%, the union confirmed.

Overall, 55% of the total number eligible to vote backed strike action and 58% of the total eligible voted for action short of a strike.

The RMT said the industrial relationship with CalMac on the Clyde and Hebrides network has "deteriorated" in recent months.

No fears about housing target, says Minister



COMMUNITIES Minister Alex Neil has dismissed a warning by Scotland's former spending watchdog that

there is a "growing housing crisis" in Scotland.

A report by the Commission on Housing and Wellbeing states that there are over 150,000 households on social housing waiting lists, nearly a million in fuel poverty, 60,000 in overcrowded accommodation and ownership is an "unachievable pipedream" for many.

Mr Neil said that the Scottish Government will exceed its target of 30,000 new homes by 2016.

Scottish deaths at highest level for 15 years

DEATHS in Scotland were at their highest level in 15 years in the first quarter of this year, according to new figures.

There were 16,521 deaths registered in the first three months of this year, 18.4 per cent more than in the same period of 2014, statistics from the National Records of Scotland show.

This was the highest number of first-quarter deaths since 2000, although levels remain substantially lower than those seen in the 1980s, the Scottish Government said.

The main drivers of the increase were deaths from respiratory diseases and circulatory diseases.

CO-OWNER GIVES US A GUIDED TOUR - AND WARNS TIME

'I don't know how long the Egyptian Halls can last'

By VICTORIA BRENNAN
Senior Reporter

ONCE regarded as one of the finest, architecturally impressive buildings in Glasgow, the Egyptian Halls is now a sad and forlorn sight.

Covered in a shroud that hints at its former glory, the 142-year-old Grade A-listed building, which has stood empty for 30 years, is propped up and on its last legs.

Its owners were dealt another blow this month with the refusal of a £5m lottery bid they had hoped could kick-start a long-overdue renovation for the Union Street giant designed by Alexander 'Greek' Thomson.

They warn time is running out for the three-storey site, which was granted permission to become a 114-bedroom hotel in 2012.

The entrance, at 92 Union Street, is unremarkable and gives no hint of any of the faded - and failing - grandeur inside.

As co-owner Derek Souter lifts up the grill and opens the door, a dimly-lit staircase is visible behind.

The electricity has long since been switched off and the only light is a shaft from



Co-owner Derek Souter outside the Egyptian Halls in Union Street

the open door. "We've met with so many people from Glasgow City Council over the years in discussions about this," the Dundee-based businessman says. "At last count it was 64."

Up the flight of stairs we step into a former Chinese restaurant on the first floor. The room still bears traces of its oriental heritage, with patches of red flocked wallpaper and mirrored columns.

Piles of masonry and stones are dotted around the dark room but the structure itself remains fairly solid.

"The hoarding we put up in 2006 has helped dry the build-

form the building into "one of the best-looking hotels in the UK". Investors for the hotel have already been lined up but repairs to the building need to be partly paid for by those in the ground-floor units, Mr Souter says, which adds complications.

His long-term plan is to turn the ground-floor units into bars and restaurants, reinstating some of the hidden Thomson columns and ceilings which are hidden behind suspended ceilings at the moment.

"You've got a treasure trove of Thomson architecture there," he says, pointing upwards. "The bars and restaurants would look incredible."

We have had so many discussions about this - at the last count it was 64

He also envisages knocking down the NCP car park at the back of the halls, creating a thoroughfare from Central Station. "Union Street has had nothing done to it for years," he adds. "People need to look at the long-term plan and not be short-sighted."

Up the stairs again and we're on the second floor, home to a former tax training office. Signs are still clear on



Despite a shabby appearance,

the interior of the Egyptian Halls is still structurally sound and could allow conversion into a 114-bedroom hotel

the walls, indicating former classrooms, a reception area and tutors room.

The second floor is much lighter and sunlight streams through, highlighting the peeling paint, timber frames which have rotted away in places, and further piles of masonry on the floor.

Mr Souter says water has penetrated narrow columns higher up, causing intricate stone carvings on top to collapse. They lie in a heap in a corner on the second floor, together with bags containing masonry that has fallen down.

He says the hoarding has saved the public from potentially serious accidents, with eight lumps tumbling down in the past year.

"It's impossible to say how long the building will last," he says. "We have asked for a

meeting with the council to discuss a way forward. We need to deal with the long-term prospects for Union Street and Egyptian Halls and marry them together."

It's been a long time since the Halls last saw any signs of life and Mr Souter is hopeful it will again. "It needs to move forward - whether it's demolition or refurbishment," he says. "If you put 17 years of your life into preserving something, you don't want that to fail. We love the building."

The spokesman said the city council had been involved with discussions about the future of the halls for a number of years and would be available for further discussions. He said: "Hopefully a solution will be found at some point to fully redevelop the Egyptian Halls."



Some of the Alexander 'Greek' Thomson-designed details are crumbling

IS RUNNING OUT FOR THE BUILDING

Union says 'pay test' is an insult

Homelessness workers reject council's offer

By RACHEL LOXTON

STRIKING homelessness workers have rejected a pay deal from the council.

Trades union Unison branded the offer by Glasgow City Council to give 70 homelessness case workers a wage rise by increasing their pay grade on the condition they pass a competency test an "insult".

The staff have been on strike for nearly 12 weeks in the dispute over their pay grade.

The homelessness case workers argue that they do a job equivalent to case workers in other departments who are on a higher pay grade, taking home £5000 a year more.

A spokesman for the council said "We are bitterly disappointed that Uni-

son has rejected this fantastic opportunity for their members to gain a pay rise in excess of £5000 and advance their careers.

"The offer was open to all of the striking caseworkers and was subject only to those staff demonstrating their competence at the new grade."

However Unison convenor Ian Leech said there was an issue of distrust be-

Our members feel the council is trying to divide them

tween the strikers and the staff.

Mr Leech said the competency test was understood to be an interview.

He said: "The workers have already displayed their competence so to offer them an interview after nearly 12 weeks of striking is a bit of an insult."

"We had a discussion

about that proposal and the staff said they didn't want to hear anymore.

"Our members feel the council is trying to divide them with this offer."

Mr Leech said the strike was "solid" and members would continue to fight for a pay grade increase.

The city council spokesman added that bosses wanted to make sure staff were at the level Unison says they are.

He said: "Unison say their members are already doing a job that merits a grade 6 salary and we simply wish to ensure that all staff are able to work at that level. We have already agreed with Unison that in the long term the number of caseworkers working at the grade 6 level should be 54 members of staff."

"Recent discussions have been about how we move towards that figure as well as support we would provide for staff looking to move up a grade."

FREE SWIM FOR EVERY READER

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