

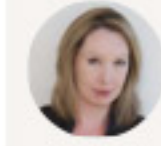
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News

Warning over calls for Egyptian Halls facade to come down



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Victoria Brennan, Reporter / 05:08 Thursday 18 February 2016 / News

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AN architect involved in the Egyptian Halls project has warned calls for the facade to be removed could see pedestrians injured or killed by plunging masonry.

Co-owner Derek Souter said the council has asked him to remove the protective facade and scaffolding from the A-listed three storey building.

But he has warned that it regularly catches lumps of falling masonry from the building, which has stood empty for more than three decades and is deteriorating.

Project architect George Morrison warned the condition was getting "significantly worse" and fears council plans to replace the facade with netting might not catch the falling stonework.

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He said: "Some of the bits that fall off, if they hit you you would be dead."

"They get caught in the scaffolding boards at each level or fall onto the ledges."

He said the facade - an image of how the building designed by Alexander 'Greek' Thomson looked in its heyday - was put up years ago to help slow the deterioration of the front elevation which suffered water damage.

He said: "In that time, there's been an increase in the number of bits falling off."

"We periodically go round and check. What can be safe one visit can become disconnected the next time. You can't predict when bits are going to fall.

"Some of the pieces that have fallen off at six to eight inches long and four inches thick. That would kill you."

He added: "Netting is not suitable - there are large areas of openings on the Egyptian Halls so it's like a holey cheese.

"If you could fix netting to the stonework, it's going to result in the netting being moved in the wind and it will damage the carved stonework.

"You would need to put loadings in for the netting that are significant. It's a nonsense to put robust fixings in to defective stonework."

He said the netting proposal was "thoroughly impractical solution and grossly insensitive."

"I understand the council is speaking to scaffolding companies for prices," he said.

"We will not be party to removing the facade because of the risks.

"I believe the council can go in anyway and charge for it afterwards."

A council spokesman said: "The proposed works on the Egyptian Halls will both preserve this building and promote public safety - always our greatest priority - by making the building weather tight and arresting the rate of its deterioration.

"These works are considered urgent for the building's preservation, and entirely unrelated to future work on Union Street. The work will require the removal of the existing scaffold structure and the erection of new scaffolding. Once the works are completed and the building is secure, the scaffold will be removed from the footway. Public safety is of paramount importance to the council and the potential risks have been fully considered and will be addressed by the proposed works. The maintenance of the building is the responsibility of the owners."

Mr Souter said he wanted the council to prove that if the scaffolding has to come down it won't endanger public safety and that a netting alternative is as safe before agreeing to do this.

Planning permission was granted by Glasgow City Council in 2012 to convert the building into a 114-bedroom hotel with a two-storey extension, and to refurbish four ground-floor shops.

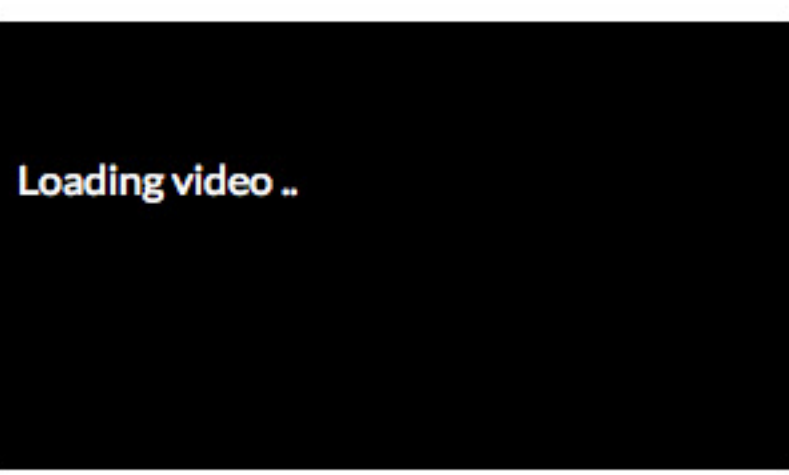
Red tape and cash problems meant the £20m project never got off the ground.

There will be a meeting today to discuss the state of the building with representatives from the council, Historic Environment Scotland, George Morrison, John Addison, of Addison Conservation, and Mr Souter, of Dundee-based Union Street Properties.

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