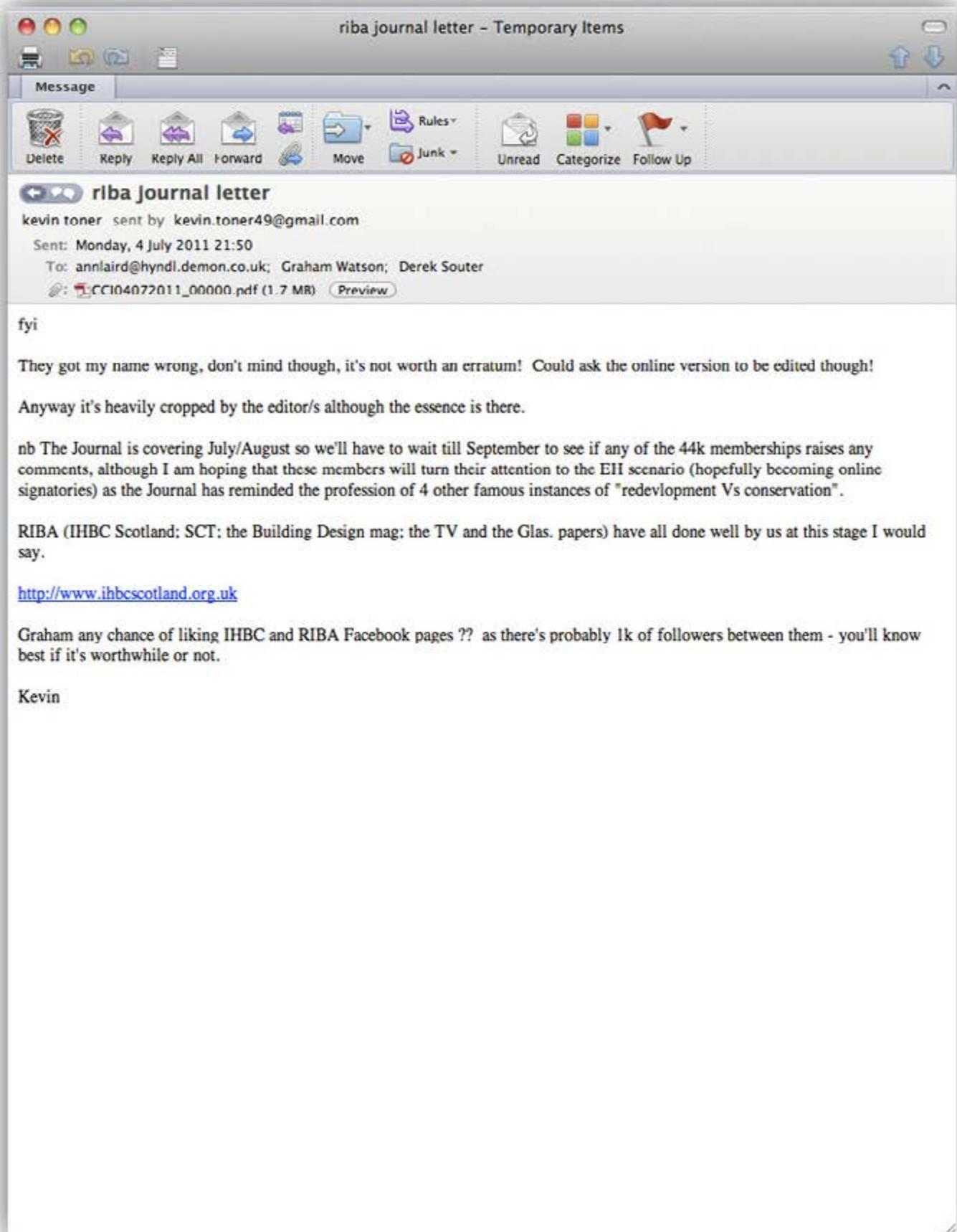




2011 MEDIA COVERAGE





LETTERS

We welcome letters but retain the right to edit them. Email rjletters@atompublishing.co.uk, fax 020 7490 4957, or write to us at RIBA, Atom Publishing, Clerkenwell House, 45/47 Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0EB

CROSSING POINT

I read about a cable car crossing for the London Thames with great interest (*RIBA* May).

In 2004 I submitted to the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition a project for a monumental landmark for the Thames Olympic Gateway (it was not shown). This proposal consisted of two linked towers on the site of the then redundant Millennium Dome, linked to the future Olympic stadium by a high capacity double decker cable car. Its stations were evenly spaced along the route to serve the Olympic venues and new developments planned for the Lea Valley site. I proposed it also be extended to the centre of Canary Wharf.

It is interesting to see that the cable car river crossing since proposed by first Rogers Stirk Harbour and Partners and now Wilkinson Eyre, is located by both more or less where I proposed mine.

Andrzej Bisztyga
Guildford, Surrey

COUNTRY PURSUIT

I read with growing disbelief that the RIBA/National Grid competition to design a pylon – which will ‘preserve the beauty of the countryside’ – is to be judged by a panel chaired by energy and climate change secretary Chris Huhne.

Can this be the same Chris Huhne who is hell bent on disfiguring hundreds of square miles of the same countryside with inefficient and ruinously expensive wind powered turbines?

Worse still, the RIBA president seems oblivious to this glaring contradiction.

Brian Collins, via email

SENSE OF PLACE

It would have been a great help to indicate more of the locations of the RIBA award-winning buildings (Best in Show, *RIBA*, June). Usually one place name would have been enough: there is room.

David W Lloyd
Harlow, Essex



SAVE GLASGOW'S HERITAGE

A masterpiece is at stake!

Efforts to convert Alexander ‘Greek’ Thomson’s Egyptian Halls in Glasgow into a hotel remain plagued by the need for public funds and now by redevelopment.

An application for listed building consent to demolish Egyptian Halls was lodged in April, cleverly comparing two schemes: a viable new hotel tower block versus a £20m conversion that is unviable because an incumbent Listed Building Repair Notice (stated

at around £11m) can’t be fully borne. All the funding offers remain about £2.5m short.

The ethos to conserve rather than rebuild is evident from the level of vested conservation expertise in the scheme. Conversion [which is promised to be ‘reversible’] has been widely publicised since February by a marketing website and an organised public meeting at the Lighthouse. Local MSPs are working on behalf of the campaigners and calling for the conversion scheme to be embraced or at least reviewed, not least because it preserves a world-renowned architectural masterpiece. This is backed by thousands of people, laypersons and professionals alike.

Our 2000-strong petition was lodged in June, giving the Scottish government time to intervene. Let’s hope the case will prove to be a perfect pilot for the pledges of the Scottish parliament in favour of sustainable regeneration.

Kenneth Toner, Glasgow

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'Let's keep business rates so we can grow the city's economy'

Glasgow City Council chief speaks out as report calls for new business body
By Business Editor Colin Donald

GLASGOW City Council's leader has demanded that the city be allowed to retain all of its income from non-domestic rates following the launch of the city's new blueprint for growth, published today.

In an interview to mark the Glasgow Economic Commission's report on the future prosperity of Scotland's largest city, Councillor Gordon Matheson said retaining business rates made "sound economic sense" and would allow the city to "continue to develop and achieve the vision we have set out".

Glasgow's new hopes to retain income from non-domestic rates, rather than to have them distributed by the Scottish Government, aligns the city with Edinburgh, whose business leaders have long argued for a greater share of business rate income.

Matheson said: "At the moment Glasgow contributes £70 million more to the Scottish Government than we receive back. It doesn't make sense. Let us keep our business rates so we can continue to grow our economy."

He also highlighted the GEC's call to make the most of "innovative financing" to help incentivise private investment in the city's infrastructure.

Matheson called on Finance Secretary John Swinney to permit a tax increment finance scheme to finance an extension to Buchanan Galleries, a key component of Glasgow's business improvement district. TIFs, widely used in the US, allow public bodies to borrow against future rental income.

Although the council leader is a leading member, the GEC is an independent body, chaired by Strathclyde University principal Professor Jim McDonald. Its participants are mainly drawn from the city's senior business

leadership, including Keith Cochrane of Weir Group, and the commission's report follows a nine-month consultation.

As well as identifying the city's key industrial strengths and remaining weaknesses, the Commission's key recommendation is the establishment of a powerful new, private-public leadership body containing corporate "big hitters", who will meet regularly to focus economic development efforts in Glasgow, to deliver on the city's economic potential and to ensure that Glasgow is "open for business".

McDonald stressed the report's aims to "help the city harness its strengths, renew its economy and identify new trade and investment opportunities over the next decade".

He said: "The principal recommendations are a sectoral focus on Glasgow's key industries to allow us to compete more effectively on the international stage; a strong partnership of civic and industry leadership to drive Glasgow's economy; and a convergence of public and city agencies to support the delivery of jobs, economic growth and international impact."

The 60-page report identifies the areas of excellence whose consolidation and growth will allow Glasgow to "make its living" in the future including low carbon industries – where the city is a recognised international hub – engineering, design and manufacturing, life sciences, financial and business services, and tourism and events sector, catalysed by the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

Welcoming the report, Stuart Patrick, chief executive of Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, said: "It is undoubtedly a staging post in Glasgow's economic renaissance".

In 2010-11 Glasgow raised £304.3m in business rates, and was granted back £233.7m, a contribution of £70.6m. In the same period Edinburgh raised £285.8m and was granted back £188.7m a net contribution of £97.1m.

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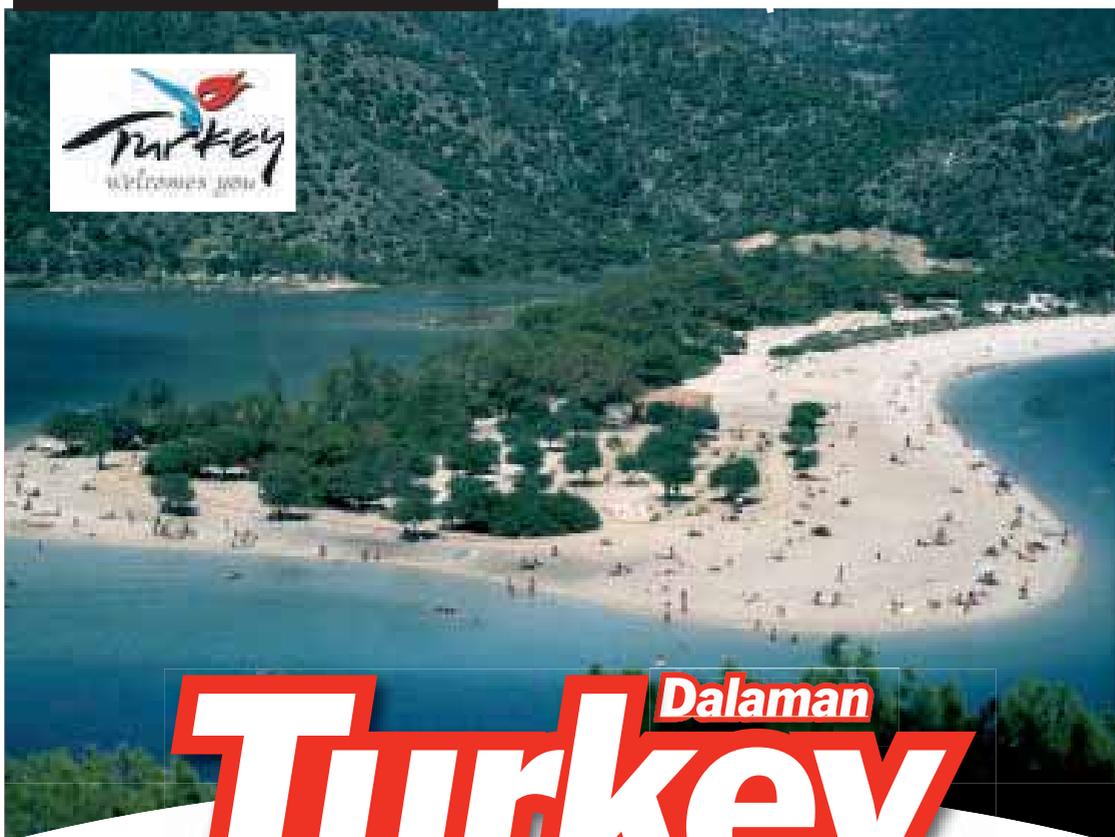
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Developer needs names to save halls

Petition plan to gather support for city landmark

By RACHEL LOXTON

THE owner of the historic Egyptian Halls is appealing to the public to help save the building – despite applying for permission to flatten it.

Derek Souter is holding a petition day tomorrow outside the 138-year-old A-Listed Alexander “Greek” Thomson building to gather support for his campaign.

The halls, opposite the side entrance of Central Station in Union Street, have lain vacant since around 1980 and are now covered in scaffolding.

Mr Souter, director of Union Street Properties (USP) and Union Street Investments (USI), claims he was forced to apply to Glasgow City Council to have the property demolished because of rising renovation costs.

But despite this he says he still wants to save the building.

He said: “It’s about raising awareness. We will dress the scaffolding boards with posters to raise awareness of what we’re trying to do – save the Egyptian Halls.”



■ The landmark Egyptian Halls, on Union Street, have been lying empty since the early 1980s

USP and USI have so far spent £5 million on the project and are willing to invest a further £12m.

The city council agreed a £1m grant and Historic Scotland a grant of around £1.65m but Mr Souter says this is not enough.

This project needs input from everyone – it needs collaboration

A council spokesman said: “We have been in discussion with Mr Souter for a considerable time.

“We remain very keen to see the building brought back into use... it is unlikely that the council would support any proposal for demolition.”

A Historic Scotland spokeswoman called the Egyptian Halls “one of Glasgow’s most his-

torically significant buildings”.

Many believe the redevelopment of the Thomson masterpiece would aid the regeneration of Union Street.

Mr Souter, whose original plan was to restore the Egyptian Halls to their former glory and create a 250-bedroom hotel, added: “We want some politicians to turn up [on Saturday] and say they want to save the building. We want people to turn up and say yeah rather than talk about it and blame the developer.

“This project has taken 31 years to solve. It needs input from everyone, from the public and private sector. It needs collaboration.”

The petition will be available to sign from 9am-12pm tomorrow outside the Egyptian Halls in Union Street.

rachel.loxton@heraldandtimes.co.uk

Commercial Property

Project takes emotional development

KEN HOUSTON

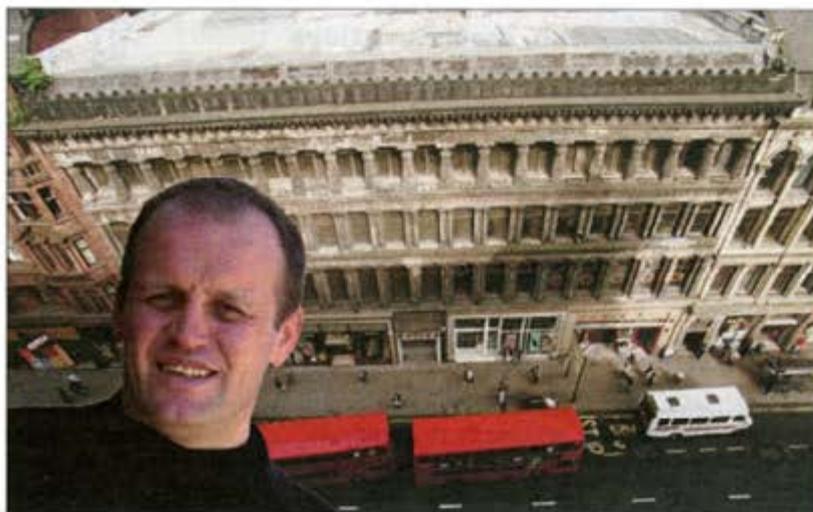
IF IT'S supposed to be fatal for a property developer to become emotionally involved in a scheme then Derek Souter, for a 52-year-old, is in remarkably good shape.

Fresh from a morning gym session at Edinburgh's Caledonian Hotel, the Dundee-based entrepreneur tells me it's impossible not to be emotional about Glasgow's Egyptian Halls, a scheme that has taken up 13 years of his life.

"How can you not get emotional about a project like this?" he asks. "When we originally became involved, the proposed redevelopment was a facade retention with new-build behind. Then we discovered the facade concealed marvellous examples of engineering excellence and innovation and that a lot more than the front was worth preserving. The technology used on this building was cutting-edge at the time and formed the basis for the later skyscraper boom in Chicago."

Souter is not, of course, an architectural "enthusiast", happy to give up his spare time to help save this masterpiece by the iconic Victorian architect, Alexander "Greek" Thomson. He is, first and foremost, a businessman who (understandably) wants to come out in profit. But he also insists that his desire to preserve and restore the landmark goes beyond financial reward.

The Egyptian Halls, like Union Street on which it stands, has been deteriorating for three decades. Souter's involvement began in 1998 when he set up two companies, Union Street Properties and Union Street Investments. At the time, there were six separate owners and his interest was limited to two ground-floor



Derek Souter, now, and the Egyptian Halls in 1998, when he first took interest

retail units. However, after several years of negotiation and legal wrangling, he managed, in 2007-8, to wrestle the title from the other parties and bring the building under the USP/USI umbrella.

No longer handicapped by multi-ownership, Souter put in place detailed plans for a hotel-based restoration of the building, which would retain the unique engineering features of the interior as well as the decorative facade.

More than three years later, and no further forward in structural terms, Souter has applied for permission to demolish and replace the building with a contemporary design. The impasse is down to a funding gap of £2.3 million, despite the landlord having invested more than £5m in the scheme and grants totalling £2.65m

having been committed by Glasgow City Council and Historic Scotland. Souter's application to demolish is based on an assertion that the building may soon be beyond repair, making a new-build the only viable option. The counter-argument, which Souter strongly denies, is that these are scare tactics aimed at forcing the hand of the authorities.

Souter now believes that a resolution is only possible if the Scottish Government comes up with the funding shortfall, claiming commercial as well as heritage advantages. He says: "Not only would such action save a building of European and world significance but a hotel would produce business rates of £350,000 per annum so the money would be recouped within a decade."

Heads of terms, he says, have been agreed for a four-star hotel operation with Longmore Buccleuch, but this commitment is time-limited.

"Apart from saving the Egyptian Halls, this scheme would kick-start the much-needed regeneration of Union Street as a whole. It could eventually be linked in with the Lighthouse at the rear and create a whole new retail and cultural quarter within the city centre."

Souter says he has no regrets about taking on the project, indeed he "has become a much better businessman because of the experience". While "never tempted to walk away", he adds that this is partly down to the support of two fellow directors, his brother, Duncan, and Kevin Kerr, a friend of many years' standing. "Other directors not so close in the personal sense may not have had the patience of Duncan and Kevin."

Describing himself as not so much a property developer but "an advertising and marketing guy with a financial leaning", Souter has worked in a managerial capacity in radio, national newspapers and advertising. A lifelong supporter of Dundee FC, in 1999 he resigned as vice chairman - having taken commercial income from £80,000 to almost £1m - as a consequence of the club's developing links with the controversial lawyer, Giovanni Di Stefano.

Still a fan, he has watched with sadness as Dundee's troubles escalated further this season, leading to administration and with it the loss of 25 points, which almost certainly cost them promotion to the SPL.

Nevertheless it may be a toss-up as to which piece of real estate has caused him the more grief - Dens Park or the Egyptian Halls.

Sweet deal for Caliber at Sugar Bond

DEALS SUGAR Bond at Leith, Edinburgh, has its second new tenant since reducing rent to £7.50 per sq ft. Caliber Interactive has taken the 241 sq m (2,594 sq ft) 7th floor office suite on a five-year lease. Ryden, Montagu Evans and CWPC acted for the landlord.

Bankhead Land, a joint venture between New Land Assets and Plum Developments, has acquired Mid Road Industrial Estate, Prestons, 40,000 sq ft of industrial property and yard space at £5.30 per sq ft.

Daleway let a townhouse on Alva Street, Edinburgh, to TNS. The 3,058 sq ft property, has been let for five years at a rental of £54,000 per annum. TNS was represented by Capita Symonds and Daleway by Eric Young & Co.

Meanwhile, Aviva Investors Pensions let a 1,927-sq ft office suite on nearby Shandwick Place to Abbey Tours Scotland for five years at £14 per sq ft per annum. The tenant was represented by McNicol PC and the landlord jointly by Eric Young & Co and SL PC.

For William Hill, Culverwell acquired a 20-year lease on 8-11 Nicolson Street, Edinburgh at £26,000 per annum.

Please send deals information (text only, please) to khr@kenhoustonmedia.com

MSP takes fight to save city landmark to Holyrood

Egyptian Halls owner is asking for more cash

By CAROLINE WILSON

A CAMPAIGN to save a historic Glasgow building from demolition has reached the Scottish Parliament.

Green MSP Patrick Harvie has lodged a motion calling on Glasgow City Council to protect the Grade A listed Egyptian Halls after the owner of the Alexander "Greek" Thomson building applied for planning permission to demolish it.

The motion calls on the council to refuse the application and back plans to transform the building into a hotel.

City council must redouble efforts to work with the owners

Owner Derek Souter, boss of Union Street Properties, says he has no option but to have the property knocked down because renovation costs have risen to £20million.

The halls have been described by Neil Baxter, secretary of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, as "the finest surviving example of an Alexander Thomson commercial building".

Mr Harvie said: "This magnificent building has been empty for too



■ Derek Souter has applied for permission to demolish the Egyptian Halls in Union Street, while Patrick Harvie, right, wants to see the building protected

long, but that is no excuse for demolition.

"Thomson has left a legacy to Glasgow at least as influential as Charles Rennie Mackintosh's and we owe the Alexander Thomson Society a debt of gratitude for their tireless work to protect this legacy.

"Glasgow City Council must reject this application to demolish the Egyptian Halls and

must redouble efforts to work with the owners to ensure the property is not just kept standing and derelict but is instead fully and sensitively restored."

Campaigns to protect the Egyptian Halls and other Thomson buildings in Glasgow have been led by the Alexander Thomson Society. The building, opposite the side entrance to Central Station, is

regarded as one of the finest in Glasgow.

However it has been lying empty for around 30 years and is in poor condition.

Mr Souter wanted to restore it to its former glory and create a 250-bedroom hotel along with 200 jobs. He believes it would help spark the regeneration of the area bringing in millions of pounds of investment.



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

The city council agreed a £1m grant and Historic Scotland a

grant of around £1.65m but Mr Souter says he needs the Scottish Government to provide an extra £2.35m.

Historic Scotland insists it will not be able to provide the project with any more cash.

caroline.wilson@eveningtimes.co.uk

Autumn start for university study course

UNIVERSITY of the West of Scotland is to introduce its Executive MBA to Lanarkshire from this September.

The EMBA, currently delivered at the university's Management Centre in Ayr, has been running for over 10 years.

Being introduced to the Hamilton Campus, it is studied online with monthly workshops.

An EMBA information session will be held at the Hamilton Campus, Caird Building on Tuesday June 7 at 6pm.

For more call 01292 886400, e-mail managementcentre@uws.ac.uk, or visit www.uws.ac.uk/managementcentre



Town centre car park for Renfrew

RENFREWSHIRE Council is to begin the latest stage of its multi-million pound regeneration programme of Renfrew town centre.

A new £250,000 car park will be built in the town centre on the site of the former telephone exchange in Dunlop Street.

It is planned to be in place to complement the reopening in November of Renfrew Town Hall following its £5.2 million refurbishment.

Contractor JCY Ltd will carry out the first phase of work which involves demolishing the old telephone exchange.

Do you have a story and picture you want featured in our Faces In The News column? Just e-mail the details and a picture to: news@eveningtimes.co.uk

Mum Jennie banks £500 boost for son's school

By EWAN FERGUS

A PAISLEY mum has helped her son's school by successfully appealing for a cash grant.

Clydesdale bank worker Jennie O'Neill secured £500 from her employer's staff volunteer grants programme.

Mum-of-three Jennie applied for a grant earlier this year to provide much needed funds for new state-of-the-art sensory equipment at St Paul's Primary School

in Foxbar. Jennie, 33, is a banking advisor at the Clydesdale's Hairst Street branch in Renfrew and her eight-year-old son Lee is a pupil at the school.

St Paul's is a mainstream school but is one of only two schools in the area to have its own communication disorder unit for children with additional support needs.

Jennie said: "I jumped at the chance when I found out I could apply for a staff

volunteer grant as I have very close links with St Paul's and was delighted that I could help them continue the great work they do for the children.

"It's reassuring to know that pupils at the school, including my son Lee, will really benefit from the new equipment."

The £500 from the bank Jennie will go towards paying for a multi-sensory box containing equipment such

as fibre optics and bubble tubes designed to stimulate the senses and create a feeling of calmness and tranquillity.

The box is designed to provide stimulation from a variety of sights, sounds and textures and help children to relax and become more alert and responsive.

Clydesdale Bank's staff volunteer grants programme funds charitable initiatives that its employees are

passionate about. They can apply for a grant of up to £500 if they are involved with local community groups in their own time.

This includes local charities or not-for-profit organisations such as schools, Brownies, Scouts or sports groups.

The money helps the groups continue their work in the local community.

ewan.fergus@eveningtimes.co.uk

Letters

WRITE TO: The Editor, The Herald, 200 Renfield Street, Glasgow G2 3QB

E-MAIL: letters@theherald.co.uk | FAX: 0141 302 7171

Important questions to be asked about our architectural heritage

THE application to demolish Alexander "Greek" Thomson's Egyptian Halls will inevitably raise a public outcry ("Threat to demolish historic Greek Thomson building", The Herald, May 5, 2011). However it also poses bigger questions about how we value our most precious heritage.

Alexander Thomson's public profile has increased greatly over the past generation, and now probably equals that of Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Yet, like Thomson's now-demolished Queens Park Terrace, his streetscape buildings such as the Egyptian Halls lack the visibility and presence of his villas and churches.

Although the Egyptian Halls are located in the city centre, Union Street is hardly one of the city's most salubrious thoroughfares. How many passing punters glance up and appreciate "the noblest wallhead in Europe", or the building's "perfection of the Greek ideal", as described by our architectural peers? Beyond the occasional group following a Greek Thomson heritage trail, how much value is the building to the general public? If it must be pointed out before it can be noticed by Joe Public, does this diminish its heritage value?

Once we enter the building, unlike many Thomson buildings, there is little of his colourful stencilling and decoration. As the building can really only be appreciated from across the street, the value to its owner is reduced, and it becomes more of a public asset. The cynic may view the current controversy as the tool of a frustrated developer, but nobody has a bottomless pit of cash. If the building is as much value to the "public good" as to the private purse, who should stump up the funding?

While the controversy persists, the Egyptian Halls continue to deteriorate. No matter how important a building may be perceived, it is never immune from demolition. The process of deterioration, even of the most important A-listed buildings, is entirely predictable. The scaffold which has obscured the Egyptian Halls for the past three years gives the stark but ominous warning that the end is nigh.

Will the deterioration of the Egyptian Halls be reversed? Beyond the current outcry, the fate of this building raises deeper and more searching questions about the future of Glasgow's heritage, particularly in a time of recession.

Dr Stuart Nisbet,
15 Victoria Crescent,
Glasgow.

I WAS pleased to learn that Jim McDonald, the Principal of Strathclyde University, has granted the university's music department a three-year stay of execution, and also offered some prospect of saving the



UNDER THREAT: Alexander "Greek" Thomson's historic Egyptian Halls in Glasgow.

Ramshorn Theatre and the Collins Gallery by converting them into charitable trusts ("A ray of hope for university music society", The Herald, May 5). Those in positions of power do not often pay attention to protests from the wider society, and I congratulate Prof McDonald on his good sense and his willingness to think again.

Of course the principal purpose of any seat of learning is to turn out graduates thoroughly trained and skilled in whatever academic discipline they have chosen, so that they can have successful careers and make a useful contribution to society. But there is, or should be, much more to a good university education than that. Even when financial resources are strained as now, universities have a crucial role in providing students with the opportunity to develop other talents, cultural or otherwise, so that they mature into well-rounded and responsible citizens.

Having achieved success in this affair, it seems that Glasgow's doughty band of protestors must now turn their attention to another blatant attempt to destroy a part of Glasgow's cultural heritage. If the new owner, property developer Derek Souter, gets his way, the iconic Greek Thomson building on Union Street will be

demolished. Over the past 50 years Glasgow's unique architectural heritage has been grievously damaged by the demolition of many of its finest buildings designed by world-famous local architects, usually to be replaced by the modern monstrosities that today ruin the city's skyline. Now another A-listed building is under threat and we rely on the city council to defend us from this new act of cultural vandalism.

When Mr Souter bought the property just three years ago he announced grandiose plans to convert it into a hotel and shopping precinct. But it now appears that these depended on massive amounts of public finance being made available. He is now trying to get the city council to finance his development by claiming that otherwise it must be demolished. I trust that another storm of protest will arise, and that our elected councillors will listen.

They should refuse permission for the Egyptian Halls to be demolished, and bluntly tell Mr Souter that the property is his responsibility and he will not be allowed to let it fall into total disrepair.

Iain A D Mann,
7 Kelvin Court, Glasgow.

Threat to demolish historic Greek Thomson building

Owner's fears as £20m hotel bid falls apart

GERRY BRAIDEN

THE owner of an iconic Glasgow building, often described as Alexander "Greek" Thomson's masterpiece, has applied for permission to have it demolished.

Property developer Derek Souter, who took total ownership of the A-listed Egyptian Halls three years ago after a decade's wrangling, said that as long-standing plans for a hotel were no longer financially viable and because local and national government will not provide sufficient grants, there was no option but to pull it down.

An application has already been submitted to Glasgow City Council in recent weeks, with the hotel plans now coming with a cost of around £20 million, five times what it would have cost a decade ago.

Mr Souter said a grant of £2.6m had already been offered but around £6m was required to make it work, adding it would create 200 jobs and repay any grant or loan within a decade in business rates.

However, the city council and Historic Scotland are expected to oppose the move, with many within the authority seeing it as an attempt by the developer to force them into coming up with several million pounds.

The council, Scottish Government and Historic Scotland have all said they cannot provide sufficient funding.

The theory that Mr Souter's move is designed to put pressure on authorities has been given added weight by the emergence of a Facebook site set up to "Save The Egyptian Halls".

The site says: "Planning permission is being sought to demolish Union Street's historic Egyptian Halls, completed in



THREAT: The facade of the Egyptian Halls on Glasgow's Union Street. Its

1872. The building is one of the most spectacular examples of the work of internationally-renowned Victorian architect Alexander "Greek" Thomson.

"Unless public money can be found to save it, the building may be condemned as soon as summer 2011 and demolished. Once the developers have been granted permission to knock it down, Scotland will lose one of its architectural jewels."

A report prepared for Mr Souter says the Halls have European importance and would not usually be considered for demolition, but that demolition and a new build "is viable in every sense" and is the only way his

firm can avoid insolvency.

It adds: "This is an extraordinary building, which has required extraordinary intervention for a long, long time now. The Scottish Government have stated they won't become involved so the only other alternative becomes the only alternative."

"There are significant obstacles presented by the current market conditions which frustrate the preservation and development of the Egyptian Halls. The likelihood that retail or mixed-use development will get underway at the site for a number of years is highly unlikely and probably impossi-



Derek Souter, above, has applied to demolish the historic building. Pictures: Nick Ponty/Colin Mearns

ble without combined support from Glasgow City Council, Historic Scotland/Scottish Government. So far there are no indications that such support is

likely. City council spokesman "The council has been in discussion with the owner of the Egyptian Halls for a considerable time over the development is very important piece of Glasgow's architectural heritage. We remain very keen to see the very important building brought back into use, and while we have not fully considered the option, it is unlikely that the council would support any plan for demolition."

The architect who styled a city

- Alexander "Greek" Thomson was born in Balfour, Stirlingshire, and created some of Scotland's most prominent Victorian secular and ecclesiastical buildings. He blended archetypal Greek styling with Egyptian and other exotic themes.
- Sometimes known as "Glasgow's other architect" after Charles Rennie Mackintosh, he has been recognised as a unique talent whose contribution to the city's architecture is immeasurable.
- His output was prolific and included works such as Moray Place (1859) and the Grosvenor Building in Gordon Street (1859); the stunningly original villas of Holmwood (1857), Ellisland (1871) and 25 Mansionhouse Road (1856).
- He was also responsible for the landmark churches in Caledonia Road (1856) and St Vincent Street (1859), the Queen's Park UP Church (1867) and Great Western Terrace (1867).

Time to commission an independent assessment of Egyptian Halls options

THE proposal to demolish the Egyptian Halls in Union Street, Glasgow, has understandably caused much comment ("Threat to demolish historic Greek Thomson building", The Herald, May 5). As one of the leading national bodies concerned with the built environment, our objection to any such demolition of an outstanding "Greek" Thomson building may be taken as read. However, we feel that matters need to move forward from simply objecting, to try and seek an acceptable solution to what we recognise is a complex matter.

The Cases Panel of the Strathclyde Group of the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland (AHSS), and the Chairman and Director of the AHSS, have held a meeting with Mr Derek Souter, Director of Union Street Investments and Union Street Properties, owner of the Egyptian Halls, to explore further the long history of this project.

We believe that there is now an urgent need for an independent assessment to be made of the viability of the options being

proposed, and that the stakeholders – Glasgow City Council, Historic Scotland, the Scottish Government and the developer – need to be brought together to resolve the issues.

Whilst the current impasse continues, the building will only continue to deteriorate.

We would further urge that the resolution to the problem of the Egyptian Halls is put in the wider context of acting as a catalyst to the rejuvenation of Union Street.

Excellent work has gone into reviving the city centre, and the Merchant City, but Union Street is in decline. Economic conditions are not favourable, but Glasgow's built heritage is a strong economic driver for tourism and inward investment in the future.

It is time to invest in that future.

**Hamish McPherson,
Chairman, AHSS Strathclyde Group,
Tobacco Merchant's House,
42 Miller Street,
Glasgow.**

MEMORIES



■ Stewart Campbell from Milngavie, left, with Isabel Brims, from Callander, and her bother Alastair take pictures of the statue of Lobey Dosser and his horse El Fideldo in Woodlands Road in 2003



Tide of people see great ship off

THE big day is edging closer as Prince William and Kate Middleton get set to tie the knot on Friday.

The world will be watching – with all eyes on Kate’s wedding gown as she walks down the aisle at Westminster Abbey.

Back in September 1967, a royal visit led to huge crowds in Clydebank as 100,000 people besieged John Brown’s

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shipyard on the day the QE2 was launched.

Spectators gathered as the royal party made their way

into the launch site. In the foreground, a mounted policeman salutes the royal visitors.

On the right, an old shop front can be seen complete with its ‘Evening Times’ signage.

The QE2’s maiden voyage, from Southampton to New York, began on May 2, 1969, taking four days, 16 hours and 35 minutes.



■ April 26, 2008: GLASGOW University student Laura Speirs, 21, was recovering after she suffered a stroke which doctors said could have been brought on by laughing too hard.

ON THIS DAY... NEWS

1962: The first American rocket landed on the moon, but the Ranger IV failed to send back any pictures due to a technical fault.

1986: The world’s worst nuclear accident happened when there was an explosion at the Chernobyl power plant in the Soviet Union.

1999: TV presenter Jill Dando, below, was shot dead on the doorstep of her London home.



SPORT

1969: Celtic completed the treble by beating Rangers 4-0 in the Scottish Cup Final.

1991: Footballer Diego Maradona, below, was suspended from the game after being arrested in Argentina for possession and distribution of cocaine.



SHOWBIZ

1928: Madame Tussaud’s waxwork exhibition opened in London.

1977: New York’s famed Studio 54 disco opened.

1982: Rod Stewart was mugged at gunpoint while in Los Angeles and robbed of his \$50,000 Porsche.

1986: Actor Arnold Schwarzenegger married TV journalist Maria Shriver.

SPT steps in to help OAPs get on buses

Free service is a travel lifeline

By VIVIENNE NICOLL

ELDERLY people who feared they would be left stranded when their Glasgow bus service was scrapped have been thrown a lifeline.

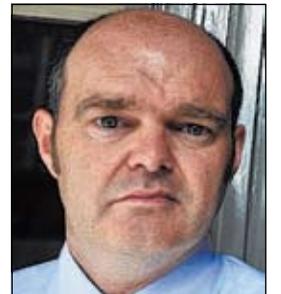
Strathclyde Partnership for Transport has stepped in to fund a new service in the Townhead/Drygate area after a commercial operator pulling out.

The new service, which started today, will be provided by local community transport group North Area Transport Association.

SPT came to the rescue after concerns that elderly people were finding it difficult to access alternative buses.

The route will allow access to local shops and post offices and link Kennedy street, St Mungo Avenue, Glasgow Royal infirmary, Drygate, Duke Street, High Street, Glasgow Cross, Trongate, Glassford Street, George Square, Killermont Street and Cowcaddens Road.

Low floor minibuses are being provided free. They will run 9.30am-2.30pm on weekdays.



■ Jonathan Findlay is delighted at the link-up

SPT chairman Jonathan Findlay said: “I am delighted we have been able to make sure those members of the local community who are not always able to access alternative mainstream transport can still lead independent lives.

“This link-up will provide an immediate

This link-up will provide an immediate solution to problem

solution to a local transport problem and SPT will strive to put in place a longer term bus service for the area.”

Glasgow council leader Gordon Matheson said: “I am delighted this service is helping to improve the access residents have to the city centre and other parts of Glasgow. It is vital communities stay connected.”

Facebook fight to save historic halls

By CAROLINE WILSON

THOUSANDS of people have backed an online campaign to save one of Glasgow’s architectural treasures.

The 138-year-old, A-listed Egyptian Halls in Union Street is at risk of demolition if the owners fail to secure funding to restore it.

More than 2000 people have joined a Facebook campaign to save the Alexander “Greek” Thomson designed building.

Owner Derek Souter wants to restore it to its former glory by creating a 250 bedroom hotel.

His Union Street

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

The city council agreed a £1m grant and Historic Scotland a grant of around £1.65m but Mr Souter says he needs the Scottish Government to provide an extra £2.35m to allow work to start.

But Historic Scotland insists it cannot provide more cash and a planning application has now been lodged to demolish the building.

caroline.wilson@eveningtimes.co.uk

Owner to outline stark choices facing Greek Thomson Halls

Last ditch talks to save city's 'Egyptian' treasure



Derek Souter in derelict Egyptian Halls, exterior below, and our story from December last year

By VIVIANNE NICOLL

THE future of a historic city centre building facing demolition will be discussed at a public meeting later this month.

In December, the Evening Times revealed the future looked bleak for the 138-year-old, A-Listed Egyptian Halls in Union Street, which are lying derelict.

The building, opposite the side entrance to Central Station, was designed by Alexander "Greek" Thomson and is regarded as one of the finest in Glasgow.

Owner Derek Souter, director of Union Street Properties, wants to restore it to its former glory and create a 250 bedroom hotel along with 200 jobs.

Union Street Properties and sister company



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

The city council agreed a £1m grant and Historic Scotland a grant of around £1.65m

Mr Souter said he needs the Scottish

Government to provide an extra £2.35million to allow work to start.

But Historic Scotland insists it will not be able to provide the project with any more cash.

Mr Souter has now invited representatives of the Scottish Government and a wide range of interested organisations

to attend a public meeting in the Lighthouse on February 23 to discuss the future of the building.

Mr Souter said: "There are two options - one is to refurbish and regenerate the Egyptian Halls and the other is to demolish it and rebuild.

"Every stakeholder, from Glasgow City Council, Historic Scotland, the Scottish Government, the Labour Party, Glasgow Chamber of Commerce and the Greek Thomson Society have been invited.

"I have called the meeting so everyone

realises the potential danger of this building being lost.

"I want them to come along and listen to what is being said about the project rather than try to ignore it and hope it is left to someone else to sort out.

"Everyone talks a good game about preserving Greek Thomson buildings but very few people put up the money that is required."

The Egyptian Halls have lain partly derelict for 30 years and are currently hidden behind a giant hoarding.

Mr Souter said the building suffered badly in the severe weather earlier this winter.

Members of the public who want to attend the meeting should contact Mr Souter by emailing him on derek@djscm.com

vivienne.nicoll@eveningtimes.co.uk



By-election to be held for Paisley seat

By EWAN FERGUS

A BY-ELECTION will be held in Renfrewshire Council's Paisley South Ward on March 17 following the death of Councillor Jim Mitchell.

The newly-elected councillor will join three other councillors in the multi-member ward.

Polling will take place from 7am to 10pm at seven polling stations for the electorate of approximately 14,000 people.

Candidates must be nominated by 4pm on February 23 and postal votes must be applied for by 5pm on March 2.

Anyone wishing a postal vote should contact the Electoral Registration Officer on 0141 842 5922.

Last week hundreds of mourners attended a service at Paisley Town Hall to pay their respects to councillor Mitchell, who died on January 21 at the age of 68.

Mongolians' visit to build Scots links

MONGOLIA is to send its first official delegation to Scotland to forge trade links and cement political relations.

Two of the central Asian nation's leading diplomats will fly from the London embassy to meet politicians at Holyrood and get a taste of Scottish culture.

The trip was suggested by David Scott, 37, an expedition organiser from Newton Mearns, near Glasgow, who has worked with Mongolia for more than a decade.

He said: "There are similarities between the countries - both have outstanding natural beauty, a large rural population as well as friendly traditions."

£50M loan initiative will help town centres

By GERRY BRAIDEN

PLANS to protect high streets from the economic downturn will be boosted by a council borrowing almost £50million and initiatives such as painting "shopjackets" on vacant retail sites.

West Dunbartonshire Council is to pour cash into redeveloping Alexandria Shopping Centre, the Clyde Shopping Centre and the Artizan Centre

in Dumbarton by borrowing at competitive rates against the anticipated rental income.

Around £13m of the total would be spent on the council's property portfolio over the next 25 years, with £35m invested in projects which can demonstrate they would save the authority money in the long-term.

So-called spend-to-save schemes can include anything from new schools to more

efficient energy consumption schemes, and "shopjackets" which would see upmarket business facades placed over empty shops to create the impression that they are still occupied and thriving.

A shop unit never occupied in Dumbarton's High Street has become a bustling butchers, while a former photo shop is now home to a 'deli'.

The shopjacket project is to cost around £20,000.

Jim McAloon, head of regeneration and economic development at the council, said: "As a council we need to be on the front foot to do whatever we can to support our businesses and town centres."

The council said roll-out of the £13m investment in its property would also lead to fewer vacant sites and put it in a position to earn higher rental incomes.

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