

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

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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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