

THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND



FOR THE STUDY AND PROTECTION OF SCOTTISH ARCHITECTURE

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Service Manager - Planning

East Lothian Council  
John Muir House  
Haddington EH41 3HA

10 February 2017  
Your Ref: 16 /01064/LBC  
**My Ref: 17.02 [EH39 5DH]**  
Allied Case:

*Please quote my reference number above, in all correspondence about this letter.*

Dear Sir

Thank you for giving the Society the opportunity to comment on the following planning application.

**16/01064/LBC      1 Invereil House, Dirleton, EH39 5DH      COMMENT**  
**Proposal: Alterations to building.**

The Society commends the intention to retain the moulded plaster cornices wherever wall openings are to be widened on the ground floor of in this Statutorily Listed, Baronial mansion, dating from the late Victorian era, built as a minor aristocratic seat set in its park, as the dower house for the Countess of Broadalbin. Of 3-storeys, attics and basement, it admirably represents all the nuances of Victorian society, above and below stairs, such as we have seen depicted in 'Downton Abbey' on the television. It was compactly planned, with a main range east-west, symmetrical, and twin wings projecting to the north. Twin, single-storey service wings project to the east. It is built of red sandstone rubble with projecting sandstone window surrounds. The slate roofs have pedimented dormers. The white painted sash and case windows have 6-over-1 panes, without 'horns' below the lower sash. The interior was expertly planned to fit the life of aristocratic society of its time, and it is for its domestic arrangements from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as its symmetrical but rather dull exterior, that it is properly a Category-B listed building. Its interior and exterior are required not to be altered in any way which would harm its special architectural or historic interest. The present application is to alter the ground floor extensively to form a single flat, to meet the particular needs of the present owners, and this appears to be the rather blinkered sole aim of their architect, but planning officers of the LPA, need to also consider the expected future survival of the Listed Building as a national and local cultural asset, under a succession of future owners, and to make sure that any proposed alterations now of the historic building, are designed and executed so that they can be readily reversed by a succeeding owner, without any permanent loss of essential fabric or character of the Listed Building. Two proposed external changes will illustrate the matter.

**NEW WEST GABLE GLAZED DOOR**

The west gable was designed with twin sash and case windows, separated by a stone mullion, central on the ground floor, the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, and they are the chief architectural ornaments of the west elevation. No door was considered necessary, and the

visual message was that those seeking entrance would go to the main south entrance. The present application specifies 'Remove existing windows and stone mullion' [on the ground floor] and Reduce window breast below cill level to create new door opening.' The proposed glazed doors have 7 panes high and 3 wide, in each of two leaves. They lack figured dimensions, but appear to be unusually large and planned to fill the whole new opening. They are 'to match existing windows', although this may only be in their white paint finish. The lack of detailed drawings suggests that the practicality of the proposed alteration has not been explored at this stage, nor the imminent danger of collapse realized, if the central stone mullion is removed: the lintol over may be two stones with a vertical joint over the mullion, and even if it is a continuous stone, it will have been dimensioned of a slenderness requiring a central support, and without this support it may fail and cause collapse of the wall above.

A more credible proposal may be to retain a shortened central mullion, flanked by small-paned windows, the panes carefully matching the proportions of the panes of the existing upper sashes, supported on a new lintol set lower in the opening, just above head height. A short USB [universal steel beam] galvanized and bolted to the jambs [use s/s expanding bolts] might provide a reversible alteration, so that a future owner could revert to the original design of the west gable. This would also be facilitated if, as a condition of any LBC, the existing sash and case windows were to be carefully removed, given protective boxing, and stored within the house, for eventual re-instatement.. Historic Environment Scotland has provided guidance on any conversion of a window to a door in a Listed building [*Managing Change in the Historic Environment (2010)*; *WINDOWS*, para 4.18] stating that the external stone window surround should be extended to floor level, and that the proposed door should be solid up to the existing cill level (matching that of the remaining window in the west face of the north wing) and glazed above. As the glazing pattern of the existing windows on every floor is of a lower sash without astragals, and the upper sash has two rows of 3 panes each, it would be convenient if the level of the existing meeting rails of the sashes, were chosen as the new doorhead height, and each door were to be glazed by a single pane (of slimlight double glazing) 'to match the existing windows'. As this form of French doors would respect the existing cill level of the ground floor windows, and so retain the dominance of the main entrance, it would not contradict the message to callers, given by the existing windows of the west gable.

#### CONVERT DOOR TO WINDOW IN N-E WING

It is proposed to convert into a window, an external doorway in the south face of the N-E wing. The instruction on the marked-up photograph reads, 'Remove existing door. Build up opening to window cill level. Fit new sash and case window to match existing, fitted with new slimlite double glazing.' There is a continuous line of dressed sandstone lintols over two adjacent doorways, and over a pair of windows, to the right, with a stone mullion between them, and with small panes in both upper and lower sashes. The doorway nearer to the window is intended to be made into a window. The door surround is entirely of dressed sandstone, and the inward-opening door has a wooden check extending further outwards than the cases of the windows project. The apron of stonework below the window cills is of very irregular construction, but is presumably what is to be intruded into the doorway, to support a new dressed stone cill, below the new window. The intention of the instructions is clearly to so alter the existing original building so that it will ideally be impossible to understand that there was once a door in this position. This aim to obliterate any sign of a previous different arrangement is very common to owners and builders, , and much money is spent to achieve this re-writing of the history of the house. A better ethic which planners of the LPA should

insist on, is to ascertain what [temporary] alteration is necessary, and to require the most straightforward method of achieving a compatible alteration, designed in such a way that it will allow its reversal in future, and in the meantime not to try to hide that an alteration has been made. In the present case, only a joiner's skill is required: the door should be carefully removed [with hinges, key and lock striking plate in an attached bag], and stored for re-instatement. A new half-glazed door, should be sealed into the existing frame, and whatever insulation and wall finish is required, fitted on the inside of the door. The astragals of the upper glazed half of the door should line with those of the existing windows, and the proportions of the panes matched as near as possible. This new door can give light as required, but only if it is functionally essential, a hinged opening casement could be made in the door. Such a reversible and honest alteration would not seek to mislead, and would almost certainly prove to be much cheaper than what was intended!

It is clear that the proposals in this application have not been considered sufficiently for the applicant to be able to understand the options available, and that considerable help will be needed from planning officers to ensure that reversible and conservation-aware alternatives must be adopted, in the end, if they are to be granted Listed Building Consent.

Yours faithfully

*Bill Dodd*

On behalf of

East Lothian Cases Panel of A H S S

Cc Historic Environment Scotland

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