



Speaking for Scotland's Buildings

19 June 2018

Cllr Susan Aitken
Leader of the Council
City Chambers
George Square
Glasgow G2 1DU

Dear Councillor Aitken

Glasgow School of Art fire

I am writing today to express the heartfelt sympathy of the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland to the City of Glasgow for the devastating fire at the Mackintosh Building of the Glasgow School of Art. This is a building we know the City Council, and indeed all the people of Glasgow, look to with pride and affection. It is a building which, together with its architect, draws thousands of visitors to your city from across the globe. Once there they quickly recognise that it is not the Art School alone that makes Glasgow so outstanding a city architecturally. It must make the City Council very proud that they are the custodians of such a place and very anxious to maintain that quality into the future. However, all buildings of character, not the listed buildings alone, are of significant importance to the city and it is the remit of our Society to call attention to their importance and to assist with the preservation of their character for the benefit of all.

The recent fire in Sauchiehall Street has also served to underline the peril that closely packed buildings in an historic city centre can face. A significant number of these buildings, including many of the first importance, are in the ownership and direct control of Glasgow City Council. While having no reason to think otherwise, the Society would like reassurance from the Council that all appropriate fire precautions have been taken with the historic estate and, in particular, the other Mackintosh building you have in your care, the Scotland Street School. This building is of a similar size and design purpose to the School of Art and is very likely to have similar construction characteristics. I am thinking particularly here of the timber lined voids within the building which have played so serious a role in the rapid spread of the GSA fire. Can we be assured that the City Council has taken cognisance of such matters within a full fire safety appraisal?

The second concern to arise from the new fire is the way it appears to have been able to take serious hold without any warning transmitted to the outside world. The Incident Officer from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, as reported on the BBC, said that the fire station is closely adjacent and that the response to the first alarm was almost immediate, and yet the fire was already extensive and uncontrollable. We know that the Scotland Street School stands alone and is unoccupied for long periods, as well as being some distance from a fire station. Can we be assured that the alarm system is adequate to the task of recognising a source of fire quickly and of transmitting this knowledge rapidly onwards to the Fire Service?

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The Architectural Heritage Society (AHSS) is a registered charity: SC007554REG. The Society is registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee: SC356726
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Speaking for Scotland's Buildings

We at the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland are grateful to those organisations who continue to look after the surviving buildings by our great architects. Scotland cannot afford to lose any of them, and especially not the School of Art. We urge the City Council to do all in its power to ensure the survival of as much of the historic fabric as possible so that this true icon can remain in place. We also have concerns regarding the future of the ABC O2; this has held an important place in the cultural life of Glasgow since 1875 and contributes a fine 1920s frontage to Sauchiehall Street. As with the GSA, we would urge that as much as possible of the historic fabric of this building be saved. We leave them to your care.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Robertson
Chairman