



## Speaking for Scotland's Buildings

*This comment was submitted by the AHSS Forth & Borders Cases Panel via an online planning portal*

**Council:** West Lothian

**Application reference:** 0820/H/20

**Address:** Ormiston House Kirknewton West Lothian EH27 8DQ

**Date AHSS comment submitted:** 13<sup>th</sup> October 2020

The AHSS Forth & Borders Cases Panel have examined the application, and **OBJECT** to the design of the proposed gate pillars.

In a David Bryce house, and in many other country houses of this period, the gate pillars are part of the scene setting of the main driveways. Although typically found by the initial entrance to the drive, there are occasions where they are elsewhere, such as The Glen in Innerleithen, where an arched gateway attached to a Baronial lodge appears just after a bridge, and forms part of the entrance court.

This proposal needs to be understood in this context. The location, although unusual, is not objectionable and does not affect the house's immediate setting. The principle would therefore be acceptable if the elements were of sufficient design quality to maintain or enhance the existing sequence of elements making up the principal approach to the house.

It is worth noting that modern design is not inappropriate for this entire proposal, and the other planning applications for Ormiston House demonstrate contemporary designs which understand their relationship with the house, and reflect it without pastiche, while remaining appropriately subservient.

Examining the elements of this proposed gateway, the side railings are simple, and not objectionable, but would benefit from being set on a stone plinth or low wall. The gate design, although more elaborate than anything Bryce would have used on a house of this scale, is not objectionable.

The gate pillars, in contrast, are weak, and let down the ensemble. They lack plinths, are of inappropriate stonework, and lack effective caps - the flat tops are particularly redolent of modern housing estates. If the desire is to create a contemporary approach, it needs to be both of higher quality, and be more consistently contemporary.

The stated desire to blend with the house is not achieved by imitating the plainer parts of the house walling, which are functional and act as a foil for the surrounding fine detail. Indeed it is difficult to see how the typically Scottish form of squared uncoursed sandstone rubble used in the house can be imitated in a pillar - house corners in this style always use larger quoins, often ornamented, and the proposed drawings appear to be coursed small blocks of sandstone rubble, which are not a fitting element of a gateway in this location.

It is not our place to suggest a definitive alternative, but there is a wealth of historic examples of country house gate pillars. A simple option would be an ashlar pillar with plinth and pyramidal top. More complex

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alternatives might add recessed panels, rusticated blocks with V joints, and more elaborate caps. The Fettes gates illustrated are Bryce at his most extraordinarily, atypically elaborate, designed with the sculptor John Rhind.

We cannot support the existing pillar design, but a good historic or modern design would not be objectionable in this location.