

Speaking for Scotland's Buildings



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

Council: City of Edinburgh

Application reference: 23/06624/CON

Address: 50 Gillespie Crescent Edinburgh EH10 4JB

Date AHSS comment submitted: 8th December 2023

The AHSS Forth & Borders Cases Panel have examined this proposal and object to the following elements:

The AHSS Forth & Borders Cases Panel has examined this application, visited the area of the site and objects to the demolition of this building within the Marchmont, Meadows and Bruntsfield Conservation Area.

The existing building stands on a triangular plot of land bounded by Gillespie Crescent, the boundary wall of the back gardens of Bruntsfield Place tenements and the access road to the housing built on the site of Gillespie's Hospital.

Having visited the area we note that the existing c 1930s boardroom, show room and office building built for the Royal Blind Asylum and School (as it was) is low rise, now 1½ storeys, has a carefully considered design, of stone and artificial stone and slate roof, and is sited close to the rear boundary wall of the Bruntsfield Place tenements. This gives a clear open outlook from the Gillespie Crescent tenements and also a clear view along the curved front elevation of the Gillespie Crescent tenements. We were surprised to discover that the 1870 Gillespie Crescent terrace, designed by David McGibbon, with its regular rhythm of canted bay windows, string courses and carved stone details below the eaves, is not listed which means that it relies on conservation area protection. In our view 3-41 Gillespie Crescent (odd numbers) should be treated as an undesignated heritage asset and any proposed design for the site opposite must respect it. The curved terrace of tenements and the low rise boardroom building with open space in front of it contribute to the special interest of Marchmont, Meadows and Bruntsfield Conservation Area.

We object to the demolition of the 1930s boardroom building and its replacement by a large 5 storey L plan building containing 145 student flats. We would prefer to see a new use found for the existing building. The options considered have not addressed community uses, studio use, nursery use, nor cultivation of the current car park, for example.

We consider that the proposed replacement is excessively large, leaves too little open space around it, represents a massive overdevelopment of the site, is of inappropriate materials and damages the special character of the conservation area and the amenity of the tenements in Gillespie Crescent and Bruntsfield Place. It does not preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.

We consider that the proposal to demolish this distinctive boardroom and office building is contrary to Local Development Plan Policy Env 5 in respect of Conservation Areas - Demolition of Buildings and the non-statutory guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas as the existing building makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of Marchmont, Meadows and Bruntsfield Conservation Area and the design of the replacement building does not outweigh the loss of the existing building. The proposal to demolish this distinctive boardroom and office building does not meet Policy 7 (d) of National Planning Framework 4 as the proposals do not respect (i) the architectural and historic character of area, (ii) the existing density, built form and layout and (iii) the context and siting, quality of design and suitable materials.

We therefore object to the demolition of the boardroom building number 50 Gillespie Crescent.