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Speaking for Scotland's Buildings

AHSS
THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND

5 November 2026

Edinburgh City Council
(Submitted via online planning portal)

26/04142/FUL 1 Rennie's Isle, Edinburgh EH6 6QA

The AHSS Forth & Borders Cases Panel has examined this application for a hotel at 1 Rennie's Isle and objects to this proposal.

The site lies outside the Leith Conservation Area but immediately adjoins its boundary, at the head of the Water of Leith beside the Category A listed Victoria Swing Bridge. Victoria Dock (Category B) and the Alexandra Dry Dock Power Station (Category B) are also close by. The Design and Access Statement accepts that the site forms part of the conservation area's setting and provides a visual backdrop to the Water of Leith. The panel does not object to the loss of the existing two-storey building, but considers the replacement too tall and too bulky for this position.

Height. The proposal replaces a two-storey building with a ten-storey tower, plus screened plant, rising to 38.85m AOD. The Statement describes the Shore as three to five storeys. It justifies the tower by reference to Dockside (10 to 14 storeys) and Ocean Point (14 to 16 storeys), which stand across the dock basin to the north-west. That cluster does not, and should not, set the scale for a site on the conservation area edge, and its height should not be extended towards the historic harbour. Policy Env 30 requires a building above the prevailing height to be appropriate in its context and to cause no adverse impact on important views. This has not been demonstrated.

Views from the conservation area. The brief seeks a building that "marks the termination of the Water of Leith". Views north along the Shore and across the swing bridge are key views out of the conservation area. A tower in this position would close those views and dominate the low frontages of the Shore, reversing the present hierarchy in which the historic buildings and the bridge define the waterfront. The proposal would neither preserve nor enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, and would harm the setting of the listed bridge and dock.

Massing. The shoulder blocks, at five and six storeys with metal-clad upper floors, already exceed the scale of the Shore. The Statement explains the stepped form partly in terms of daylight to neighbouring flats. The south-east gable, facing the Shore, is a largely blank wall reserved for a mural. Public art cannot compensate for an elevation that does not respond to the scale and grain of the conservation area.
Imagery. The Council should test the proposal against accurate verified views from the Shore, the swing bridge and across Victoria Dock and the Albert Dock Basin.

We consider that this application does not comply with NPF4 Policy 7, City Plan 2030 Env 4, Env 11 and Env 30. The panel asks that the application be refused in its current form. A revised scheme should reduce the overall height, omit the landmark tower and relate its massing to the Shore and the conservation area edge rather than to the taller blocks across the basin. We therefore place an objection.

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