

Speaking for Scotland's Buildings



AHSS Strathclyde Group Office
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Attention : Caroline Strugnell
The Planning Department
Loch Lomond & The Trossachs
National Park Authority
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Dear Sir / Madam,

APPLICATION : 2020/0055/DET . Erection of training centre (use Class 8) comprising leadership centre and 4 no. visitor accommodation buildings with associated parking and landscaping, Land Adjacent to Ross Priory, Gartocharn, West Dunbartonshire, G83 8NL

We have considered this application and inspected the site and to wish to make the following comments :

The proposed project sits within the grounds of the Ross Priory estate. The historic house that forms the jewel in the centre is a category A listed building and the grounds are included on the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland, the national listing of significant gardens. It is a very special place. And it looks over the grounds that sweep down to the jewel of Scotland, Loch Lomond. Any interventions into this setting need to be extremely sensitively done.

We note that Ross Priory itself is owned by Strathclyde University and is currently used as a conference centre, function centre and guest accommodation. Similar buildings combining these facilities can be found all over Scotland. The attraction of another one here is understandably the setting. So if the setting is to inspire and inform any interventions, then it needs to be very sensitive and optimal in design. We are not convinced that the current proposals do and set out our reasons below.

The need for another conference centre in this immediate area or central west of Scotland is questioned. With others available in different forms, is what is proposed here going to negatively impact on their viability? That at Ardoch just a few miles away is very similar in terms of facilities, of setting and view, and has very modern additions for specifically for such purposes. It is known the Hunter Foundation. (It is to have new ownership, but retain the same function). We can't help

but notice some duplication in the new proposals. It is also anticipated that the iconic Ross Priory main building itself will cease to function as it has been under the University. This needs clarification within this application as they are both within the same grounds; the one will impact on the other.

LOCATION & LAYOUT

The choice of location of the proposed centre has the benefit of it having a degree of screening from the main house and from the grounds which incorporate the golf course. Screening would be provided by vegetation, the old stables building / cottage and a very slight fall in levels. This is acceptable for a modestly scaled and sensitive development. This site sits alongside the old stables block and cottage amongst boats. The stables block is listed C and requires attention appropriate to that status. Much of it is completely derelict, yet nothing is yet proposed for its restoration or integration into the new layout design.

The proposed leadership centre building will overlook phenomenal views of Loch Lomond with large expanses of glazing that will require screening for much of many events. We don't understand the thinking behind a pond with vegetation between the central space and the Loch. It would be preferable to have gentle unimpeded lawns down to the shoreline. It is presumed that it will be run in tandem with the facilities at Ross Priory itself. If this centre is to be justified as filling a void in the market for such events, then much of the benefit would be the uniqueness of its ability to facilitate net-working and socialising. Much of that would be outwith the formal event in the social spaces and outdoors in this great setting. All circulation on foot should be easy, secure, safe and enjoyable. This is only partly explained. How does this interrelate with the boat club facilities and other shore buildings?

The accommodation pods are randomly arranged partially obscured by vegetation front and back (most still to be planted) with restricted views. While these aspects do not in themselves raise concerns, we foresee pressure to limit vegetation to enhance the views; that what is shown as mature trees will be omitted or kept minimal.

Little interface is indicated with the boat club facilities or stables / cottage building nor the boat hard standing areas. This is very pertinent as the vehicle circulation and parking is to be shared with this., now even more so. There is potential for conflict with parking and movement of boats on the hardstand. If national and foreign dignitaries are to be accommodated here, there could be an apparent compromise in security and privacy. (This is something that will be difficult to resolve compared to the relative seclusion of Ardoch nearby).

DESIGN

The ideal of Tom Hunter for premises that are iconic and inspired by the existing gothic Ross Priory while simultaneously epitomising contemporary future proofed architecture immediately sets a brief that raises challenges. But these do not need to lead to conflict.

The design of the proposed main building is fairly neutral. The materials indicated appear largely naturalistic. The curves of the walls look fairly gentle. In spite of some practicalities we do not object to this design concept.

The accommodation pods though are very different and aggressively brutalistic. Although clad in timber, their form and almost black colour is quite unacceptable. We see no reason for this.

CONSERVATION AND HERITAGE

As this proposal would become an integral part of the important historical setting, it is essential that this is more comprehensively covered. We have already touched on the interface of the

newbuild proposals to the stables / cottage. (These may also be referred to as the bothy and pigsty ruins as well). They should be seen a group of buildings which, although in various states of condition, still retain a degree of spatial relationship that can be usefully employed. They therefore are not merely of historic interest, but have an untapped potential for the University and its Ross Priory facilities, the boat club and, if integrated in the greater design, also the Leadership Centre itself. We are very pleased to learn that an agreement has been reached for a sum towards such attention here and elsewhere on the estate. In our view that sum will fall short of what should eventually be required. Restoration and adaptation to new sustainable usage would need to include a greater cognizance of their role in this environment and some degree of both hard and soft landscaping. As we noted above nothing is yet proposed for such restoration, but the allocation of such funding confirms an acknowledgement that this is essential.

We are aware of other issues such as the impact on the natural environment too and concur with the concerns expressed by others in this regard, but do not include them in our comments as they are beyond our remit.

We feel that the proposals in this application still have some way to go to achieving the appropriate design standards required and in resolving some of the greater considerations for the estate. The design standard (form and finishes) of the accommodation pods in particular is of great concern and would be objected to. It is understood that the project is being discussed soon. We trust that our concerns will be considered and resolution met through the client and consultants.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Iain S. Wotherspoon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Iain Wotherspoon.
Chairman. Cases Panel. Strathclyde Group.