Plans submitted for The Registers

Detailed applications for planning permission, listed building consent and conservation area consent for the £60m regeneration of The Registers, an area to the south east of St Andrew Square, have been submitted to City of Edinburgh Council, following the completion of a meticulous consultation process.

The plans propose a redevelopment of a complex of buildings in a neglected warren of lanes to create a vibrant and complementary mix of new offices, hotel, residential / serviced apartments, retail units and restaurants, which are expected to bring nearly 750 jobs to the city centre and an economic boost of £71.4m (GVA) per year, alongside a ‘heritage gain’ for the area.

As part of the plans, two key historic listed buildings currently on the ‘at risk’ register will be restored, giving new life to one of the most important art deco banking halls as a restaurant at the neo-classical 42 St Andrew Square and reinstating a former warehouse at 28 West Register Street into active commercial use while preserving its remarkable Venetian Gothic façade.

Buildings along part of West Register Street, including an empty 1960s office block and a derelict 1850s Victorian tenement will make way for much needed high quality Grade A office accommodation, designed to attract new businesses to the city and essential to the rejuvenation of the area which forms an important gateway to the new St James development.

The Edinburgh-based property investment and development company, the Chris Stewart Group (CSG), which delivered the award-winning transformation around Advocate’s Close in the Old Town, owns The Registers site and is behind its regeneration. CEO Chris Stewart said:

“We are delighted to be able to deliver a comprehensive regeneration of this dark and uninviting part of the city centre. Restoring more than 90 per cent of the listed fabric of the site, as well as the neglected surrounding lanes, is a major heritage gain for Edinburgh as these buildings can, once more, be put back into business and commercial use and thus can be universally appreciated and enjoyed by all.

“Delivering this regeneration will not only result in huge improvements to the public realm, they will also bring significant economic benefits to the wider city, including the delivery of much needed Grade A office space, whilst also complementing the St James development.”

Backed by independent evidence from economic and heritage experts, the Chris Stewart Group proposals encompass the site in its entirety as the only feasible option to deliver tangible benefits to the city and enhance the universal value of the city’s architecture.

The realisation of this vision hinges on the demolition of an empty, dilapidated and much altered Victorian former tenement building – a structure that respected architectural historians confirm has no special historic or architectural interest and represents less than 10 per cent of the listed fabric of the site. In fact, its listed status was likely only secured on the basis that it is connected to the significantly more important Venetian Gothic building, which is to be restored under the proposed plans. In its place, the CSG applications propose a building of excellent architectural design; a building that will complement its surroundings utilising a combination of stonework and glazing and sensitively merging the old with the new.
Independent historians have also confirmed that the regeneration presents opportunity and a significant overall heritage gain. Commenting on the two buildings to be preserved as the heart of The Registers project, Andrew Wright calls 42 St Andrew Square “a triumph” and “a building of such high quality, both in its design and in the specification of exotic materials” whilst the façades of the Venetian Gothic warehouse he calls “full-blooded….. with carvings of fabulous skill and originality.”

Chris added:

“Amid the current climate of concern for our urban heritage, and conscious of our role as trusted developers, we have meticulously explored all the options for this site, both structurally and in terms of its ultimate uses. We have reworked our plans to ensure our final design proposals are visually compelling and sit comfortably in Edinburgh’s skyline; and we have consulted extensively to ensure our planning proposals stand up to scrutiny on every level. By preserving and bringing new life to two important period buildings, within a vibrant setting of new and old, we can deliver something significant for the city.

“Backed by the weight of heritage and economic evidence, we believe that by viewing the site in its entirety, rather than in a piecemeal fashion, the plans proposed are the only feasible option to deliver tangible benefits for the city, economically, socially and culturally, as it continues to build its international reputation as a place to visit and do business.”

The development will create an attractive, vibrant and safe thoroughfare in line with the St James Masterplan and Register Lanes study. An area that is presently let down by a cramped, maze-like layout and serious safety and security issues, as well as on-street clutter and readily accumulated rubbish that has had a particularly detrimental impact on the Venetian Gothic building and West Register Street Lane, will be revitalised. The plans will open up the area, while actively helping to meet the expectations of local businesses that want to see a significant upgrade to the public realm, including solutions to waste disposal with City of Edinburgh Council’s 2016 ‘no bins on streets’ target in mind.

The Chris Stewart Group has a proud track record for complex transformational projects and combining high-quality design and architecture with existing heritage buildings. The company recently completed the award-winning Advocate’s Close development in Edinburgh’s Old Town, which has been named the RIAS Andrew Doolan ‘Best Building in Scotland’, and has begun works at Baxter’s Place, Edinburgh, which is to become a Courtyard by Marriott hotel.
Notes to Editors

1. The Chris Stewart Group is a property development and investment business based in Edinburgh. Its current portfolio includes interests across residential, office and hotel and leisure property.
2. The company’s expertise is for complex, transformational city centre developments
3. Set up in 1996, by Chris Stewart, and remains an independent, privately owned business
4. The architects for The Registers are Gareth Hoskins Architects and Morgan McDonnell Architecture.