

Appendix 5

7.3 Please explain why you believe that the transfer of the land or, if this application is in respect of a tenant's interest, transfer of the tenant's interest is in the public interest.

The previous answer was directed at the sustainability of the development in relation to the land, but there is also a wider public interest which is served by the proposed development of the land, as undernoted:

First, **preserving and growing a sustainable local community.**

Tom Kerridge once said that 'When a community loses its pub, it loses its soul'. This is true for North Queensferry, where the lack of a social meeting place has had a harmful effect on the cohesion of the village. It is difficult for newcomers to meet other residents. Many of the written objections to the planning applications for change of use highlighted the affection felt by members of the community for the Albert, where many happy memories of social events were made. The void is not just related to access to a pub but also to a lack of a social hub, where individuals, groups and clubs can meet and interact. If such a facility is provided, it will make a significant contribution to rebuilding, reinforcing and growing a vibrant and sustainable local community.

Second, **economic benefit to North Queensferry and to the wider area**

The provision of proper facilities for visitors will facilitate both increased tourism and also increase dwell time for visitors, both of which factors will bring economic benefits to the community, especially as the Albert will be under community control. As noted below, the economic benefits arising from the resultant increase in tourism, and increased dwell time for visitors is likely to spread to the wider area.

Third, **promoting sustainable tourism**

North Queensferry is a tourist hub by virtue of its location. Lack of a place for affordable hospitality is harming sustainable tourism. Many visitors are disappointed by the lack of a place to have something to drink, to eat and to absorb the history of the Queensferry crossing and to enjoy the fine views of the bridges. As noted above, the existing Rankin's Cafe and the Wee Restaurant have limited opening hours and capacity and cater for a specific market. With the provision of a community-run pub and hotel, North Queensferry would be enabled to play a much larger part in supporting the new tourism initiatives such as the Forth Bridges Trail and the Fife 191 tourist route, as well as the existing attractions such as Deep Sea World, Fife Coastal Path, Pilgrims Way, the Forth Light Tower and as an ideal location for getting a close up view of the UNESCO World Heritage Forth Bridge and as a base for activities centred on the bridges and the hiking and cycling trails.

Furthermore, the proposed development can be used to help promote tourism which is also sustainable. It is possible to visit North Queensferry by public transport, and the existence of the Town Pier, with the possibility of crossing the Forth by boat, and the regular train service over the Forth Bridge makes this not only possible, but a highly attractive offer for visitors.

Additionally, the Coastal Path and Pilgrim Way are the starting points for long-distance walks and also provide the possibility of cycle links more widely into Fife. The re-opening of the Albert Hotel will provide the opportunity for its Management to seek to co-operate with other bodies and operators to provide sustainable visitor experiences making use of both public and active transport.

Fourth, **Preservation of heritage and enhancement of the UNESCO World Heritage Site**

The Albert Hotel is itself a significant part of both the built and the cultural heritage of North Queensferry, having been central to the life of North Queensferry since 1824. As noted above, it is category C listed and is situated in a Conservation Area. The *North Queensferry Conservation Area Appraisal and Conservation Area Management Plan* dated 26 August 2011 says of the Albert:

The early 19th century Albert Hotel occupies a prominent site at the corner of Main Street and Battery Road. It is one of only two remaining hostelries in this small village where there were once thirteen such establishments catering to the vital ferry trade. Originally known as Mitchell's Inn after its owner Robert Mitchell, this building was erected on the site of Hope Tavern which traded in the mid 18th century. This coaching house changed its name to Albert Hotel in honour of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's arrival at the Town Pier in 1842. The bowed pub windows at ground floor level date from the Edwardian period.

The building, with its prominent *Albert Hotel - 7 Days* painted signage on its gable end presents an iconic foreground in pictures of the Forth Bridge taken from North Queensferry. It is frequently seen, alongside the Forth Bridge, in the media, including television and film, as a symbol of North Queensferry. Most recently, in the film *The Lost King*, the use of its exterior, shot from a low angle to take in a train crossing the Forth Bridge, presented a vivid and iconic image. Until its closure in 2017, it provided a vibrant social centre for the community, a role given national prominence by its championing by author Iain Banks as his local. As is clear from the strength of feeling evidenced in the public reaction to the various unsuccessful planning applications (discussed in section 7.8), including the almost overnight flowering of a grass-roots *Save the Albert* campaign, and the overwhelming positive result of the Ballot conducted as part of the Part 5 procedure, the Albert is not just a licensed pub and hotel, but also part of the very cultural fabric of the community.

North Queensferry Heritage Trust also supports the proposed community acquisition as the means by which an important part of North Queensferry's Heritage can be saved.

Furthermore, North Queensferry enjoys special status as a bridgehead zone under the UNESCO designation of the Forth Bridge as a World Heritage Site. The *Statement of Universal Value* which accompanies the listing includes, amongst its protection and management requirements, the following:

Specific long-term expectations related to key issues include maintenance of strong community support, broadening understanding in the context of world bridges, attention to developments within key views, risk management, and inspiring others.

The restoration and reopening of the Albert Hotel as a functioning visitor facility will make an important contribution to supporting these objectives of the UNESCO listing.

Fifth, facilitation of Fife Council planning and policy objectives

The projected development of the land is wholly accordance with the Fife Council Local Plan and with relevant Fife Council Planning Policies.

In particular, the *Fife Council Local Development Plan* contains within its strategic objectives the following:

[The support] of Fife's town centres as hubs of activity which adapt to changes in their role so they can remain centres for commercial, community, and cultural activity.

(Paragraph 16 of the Spatial Strategy).

Paragraph 28 singles out North Queensferry, stating:

More investment will be investigated during the life of this Plan to improve the built heritage at North Queensferry and, on a rolling basis, across Fife's conservation areas

Fife Council Planning Policy 3 (Infrastructure and Services) states:

Loss of Valuable Infrastructure: Development proposals will not be supported where they would result in... 1. the loss of viable and valuable cultural, tourism or community resources;

It is the objective of this policy to support the continued use of community facilities (including hotels and public houses) as important focal points for local activity, especially where they serve a valuable employment, tourism and/or local community purpose.

Fife Council Policy 6 – Town Centres First aims to protect *the vitality and viability of town centres and the local economy.*

The restoration and re-opening of the Albert Hotel consequent upon a successful Part 5 Acquisition process, will clearly facilitate these planning objectives.

Sixth, Serving the Broader Public Good

The present Application needs to be appreciated in the light of the circumstance that the Albert Hotel has been closed since 2017 and has not only been left to deteriorate but has been subject to a campaign of active and destructive intervention by its present owner, who has made repeated planning applications seeking change of use. The stark truth is that, unless the Albert passes into community ownership, there can be no realistic expectation that it will be restored and re-opened. If the property is reopened as a community asset,

then that will lead to the public good being served by the benefits which will accrue from Community ownership.