

Appendix 7

7.8. Further relevant information

As set out above, the Albert Hotel was central to the life of North Queensferry from at least 1824 until 2017. Since its closure the Albert has been greatly missed by the community. Prior to the making of the present application by the community body, there had been a number of informal approaches to the owners by various parties with a view to purchasing the property, but none of these bore fruit.

The recent **timeline** is as follows:

2017:

Closure of the Albert;

2019:

Valuation survey by Shepherds Dunfermline places a value of [REDACTED]. Verbal offer for this sum to the owners rejected.

April 2020:

Owner commences stripping out works;

15th December, 2020:

Owner submits planning application for Change of use to 4 residential flats along with a second application seeking Listed Building Consent;

February/March 2021:

Objections lodged by North Queensferry Community Council as statutory Consultee, the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, The Community Body and 101 individual residents;

17th June, 2021:

Application withdrawn;

30th August 2021:

ACG submits informal offer to purchase (see above);

4th October, 2021:

Owner submits 2 planning Applications, in substantially similar terms to the applications previously withdrawn;

December, 2021:

Objections lodged by North Queensferry Community Council as Statutory Consultee, the Community Body, and 132 individual residents;

25th August, 2022:

Applications refused;

1st September, 2022:

Community Body sends Written Request to the Owner of Land under Part 5 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016;

7th October, 2022:

Owner appeals Planning Refusal to Scottish Ministers;

October/November, 2022:

North Queensferry Community Council, the Community Body and a substantial number of residents write to the Reporter opposing the Appeal;

2nd December, 2022:

Appeal refused. In refusing the Appeal, the Reporter made a number of findings which are supportive of the reasons given in the present Application. These include:

7. ...I must consider whether the building represents a “cultural, tourism or community resource”. If so, I must also determine whether it is both “valuable” and “viable”. The policy itself does not specify how such an assessment should be made; this is left to the supporting text, which also clarifies the policy objectives, and which is material to my consideration.

10. North Queensferry is undoubtedly a tourism destination due to its historical interest (summarised in the conservation area character appraisal), its location beneath the Forth Bridge (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), and the presence of Scotland’s national aquarium within the village. It is also located on the Fife Coastal Path, and is a starting point for a branch of the Fife Pilgrim Way. In this context, I consider a centrally-located hotel with public bar and restaurant represents an important tourism resource, providing guest accommodation as well as offering food and drink, and thereby contributing positively to the attractiveness and vitality of the village as a tourism destination.

12 The listing indicates the building has been a hotel ever since its construction in the early 19th century, which was on the site of a previous hostelry that operated in the mid 18th century. It has been known as the Albert Hotel since 1842, when its name was changed in honour of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert arriving in the village at the nearby town pier. I consider it makes a positive contribution to the historic character of the village and the conservation area not only through its architectural interest and prominent location but also because of the historic and social value derived from its ongoing function as a hotel and public bar. In that respect I consider it represents part of the cultural fabric of the village and constitutes a cultural resource.

13. Overall, I conclude the established use of the appeal site as a hotel with public bar and restaurant does constitute a cultural, tourism, and community resource under the terms of policy 3.

19. Although other community resources exist within the village and there is potential for the other comparable hotel to re-open, I am not persuaded that the established use of the Albert Hotel is any less valuable, nor that its loss would not be significant in the local context. Moreover, as noted above, I also consider the appeal site has cultural value by virtue of its particular history and the character of its use (over and above its architectural interest). This remains the case irrespective of the existence of other resources in the village. Overall, in the context of the number and nature of available tourism and community resources in North Queensferry, I conclude that the appeal site does represent a valuable cultural, tourism, and community resource. It follows that the principle of the proposed change of use is contrary to policy 3, unless it is demonstrated that the established use is not viable.

30. ... The most recent valuation confirms a value little more than half the asking price. It thus appears to me that the appellant's desired sale price may be significantly at odds with the current market reality. The simple fact a property's value may have decreased does not in itself mean its established use is unviable, nor does the fact its value might be higher if consent for an alternative use could be secured.

36. Overall, I conclude that the principle of the proposed change of use is contrary to policy 3 as the property constitutes a valuable cultural, tourism, and community resource, and it has not been demonstrated that its established use is not viable. It follows that the principle of the development is also contrary to policy 1.

24th January 2023:

Meeting amongst Community Body, ACG and Owner;

12th April 2023:

Owner submits planning application and application for listed building consent purportedly for reconfiguration of hotel and creation of 4 "Hotel suites" which the Owner states will be used for Air B&B purposes. North Queensferry Community Council as Statutory Consultee, the Community body and 109 residents submit individual objections. The Community Council and the Community Body each remark that the "reconfiguration" to form a bar in the basement is not feasible for a number of reasons including, but not limited to, restricted light, restricted ceiling height, general unsuitability and impossibility of providing adequate fire exits. The Community Council and the Community Body each remark upon the absence of common service areas for the air B&B accommodation and the strong similarity between the "Hotel Suites" and the residential flats shown in the previous Applications;

15th April, 2023:

Public Meeting in North Queensferry Community Complex, attended by more than 120 people who voiced the strong opinion that the hotel was required as a sustainable facility for the community and supported the idea of a community 'buy out'. Much anger was expressed in response to photographs showing the extent of damage to the interior of the building;

4th May, 2023:

Declaration of Result of Ballot under Part 5 procedure. Out of an electorate of 897 voters, 706 votes were returned, a 78.7% turnout. Of these, 693 were in favour of the proposal, 10 were against and 3 ballots were declared invalid due to missing serial numbers;

8th August, 2023:

Owner withdraws planning Applications;

18th August, 2023:

ACG sends to Owner its proposal to purchase.

As the above timeline discloses, there is an immense will manifested within the Community to restore and re-open the Albert Hotel to serve as a vibrant, living community asset. The Community, both in spontaneous action and in the Ballot has indicated overwhelming support for again seeing the Albert contribute to the building of a sustainable community life. It has been frustrated at every turn by the actions of the Owner: not being prepared to consider sale at a realistic market value; and also, in undertaking interventions which have damaged the property. The existing owner has had its opportunity, but has, ultimately, failed the Community. The time has now come to empower the Community to rescue the Albert from permanent closure or worse, and to enable the community to enjoy the fruits of Community Ownership and Control.

Consent, therefore, should be given to the present Application.