



Holyrood Progress Group
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1. Following the Holyrood Progress Group meeting on Wednesday 21 March, I am instructed to write to you in the following terms.
2. The Group discussed your letter to me of 16 March. Members were anxious that I should convey to you their keen awareness of auditing issues and the depth of concern which informs the decision-making process in which they participate. While cost and programme considerations form the basis of the Group's remit, there is an awareness of the need to balance these with issues which extend beyond simple cost drivers. These wider considerations include government and public policy objectives relating to quality of design; sustainability; design life; planning requirements and good practice in relation to archaeology. As you will appreciate, the Group is aware that the cheapest option does not necessarily deliver the best value for money; rather members try to take responsible decisions within a complex environment. In this context, the recommendations made following the meeting on 16 March were not taken lightly and the purpose of this letter is to set out the reasoning behind them.

Queensberry House archaeology

3. Members appreciate the fact that there is currently no provision within the budget for additional archaeological work. However, they are mindful of Government guidelines which put the onus on developers to allow necessary archaeology to be undertaken in advance of intrusive construction work. The Group would not wish to recommend that the Parliament put itself in a position where it could be criticised for circumventing stated policy. Given that

£920,000 has already been invested in archaeological investigations, the Group took the view that it would appear perverse to fail to fund this final work given that it was thought likely to be the most fruitful area for investigation. The Group understands that Historic Scotland may be in a position to support the cost of this work to some extent and hopes that this can be used to offset the total costs. Nonetheless, the Group remains of the view that this work should be carried out.

Cost Savings Exercise General

4. As I think you are aware, the Group were concerned about comments made both by yourself and by the Project Director at the previous meeting and repeated in writing to the effect that the architects had failed. Members recognise that you qualified those comments on this occasion. Nonetheless, they remain of the view that serious allegations about the performance of the design team have been put on the record and that these should either be substantiated – in which case the Group would wish to initiate some remedial action – or else retracted. In particular, if there was a fundamental problem within the design team which had affected their performance in keeping to budget it does not seem wise to members to wait until later fee negotiations to address these. The Group would be grateful for your views on this issue.

MSP windows and cladding/Assembly building cladding

5. As you will recall from earlier correspondence, the decision to procure Kemnay granite was taken on the basis that, having viewed samples, the Group stated a clear preference for the appearance of the Scottish granite. Members were also mindful of the wider economic benefits which would accrue to Scotland with the purchase of Kemnay granite and the strength of political feeling in support of the view that local materials should be used where practicable. For these reasons, and given the strenuous efforts made by Kemnay quarry to meet the necessary deadlines for production, the Group would be very reluctant to recommend diluting the commitment made to procuring Kemnay Quarry for these packages.

Assembly building concrete frame

6. The Group considered very carefully the evidence put to them in relation to the concrete ceiling of the main public foyer. In considering this matter the Group were mindful of the distinction between front and back of house which has informed all their deliberations to date. The advice of those members with professional experience as architects and scrutiny of the samples available also weighed heavily in the Group's conclusions.

7. Members were persuaded of the argument that it is not architecturally appropriate to imitate a high quality material by using an inferior material, albeit of similar appearance. An alternative material cannot behave in the same way as concrete and to employ it would be to be untrue to the principles of design which underpin the complex as a whole. The Group recognises that to some extent this is indeed a technical argument, but believes that in

engaging an architect of the calibre of Enric Miralles, the client committed itself to the construction of a building informed by the very highest quality and probity of design. The building as constructed so far has remained true to that architectural integrity and the Group believes that it would be fundamentally wrong to deviate from that degree of quality at this point.

8. In addition, inspection of photographs of 'imitation' concrete on the new Museum of Scotland and the sample rendered panel seen by the Group did not offer comfort as to the appearance of the finished surface. The advice of the structural engineer to the effect that construction detailing would be handled differently in render from concrete was also relevant. Given the importance of the entrance foyer in the public perception of the Parliament building, Members did not think it was acceptable to be seen to compromise on quality and integrity in this part of the building above all others which will be subject to close scrutiny by the public, the media, and the international architectural profession.

9. Similar arguments apply to the choice of concrete finish in the public areas. Had the process of construction been reversed, it might have been acceptable in similar circumstances to have considered applying a lower grade of concrete to the offices in the MSP block. However, given the evident quality of the light grey concrete in this area, (as members of the Group who inspected the concrete testify), it is not viewed as acceptable to use an inferior quality of material in the most public part of the building. Concrete is already a more cost-effective form of internal cladding than many alternatives might have been (i.e. stone, [?]), but this argument only holds true for as long as a finish of appropriate quality can be assured.

10. As requested, Members also revisited their earlier decision in relation to the Canongate building. This building has evolved in response to comments made by the Royal Fine Arts Commission and the City of Edinburgh Council about the visual appearance of the lower part of the Canongate and the formal entrance to the Parliament building. The scheme as currently designed answers the desire for a dramatic expression at the end of the Canongate while also delivering functional benefits in terms of access to the building. Members view the Cantilever as fundamental to that strong statement which has echoes in similar design features elsewhere on the site. Again, the Group remains of the view that the current design should be retained and – as with the other proposals put before them – harbours serious doubts as to whether changes of the kind proposed would prove acceptable to the planning authority in any event.

11. Finally, and as a general point, the Group is aware that the estimates of possible savings under all of these headings require to be treated with considerable caution. It is their understanding that there can be very little certainty about estimates of savings which are not based on actual design and which do not take full account of the costs of redesign and attendant fees.

12. The Group recognises that it is now appropriate for them to report to the Corporate Body the results of the cost savings exercise in the context of the