

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL HEADQUARTERS

RIAS AWARDS CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE 2019



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West Dunbartonshire Council Headquarters

After years of uncertainty the Former Academy and Burgh halls became the new home of the West Dunbartonshire Council.

Dumbarton Academy and Burgh Halls was built in the 1860s in the architectural style known as Gothic revival. The style is identified by pointed arches which are used for windows, doors, and decorative elements like porches, dormers, or roof gables. The tall tower is the focal point for Church Street, with the entrance located at its base.

The building was designed by the famous Glasgow architect William Leiper. Leiper also restored and altered the building following a fire in 1882.

The building was hit by fire again in 1976. It fell out of use and was cordoned off for safety reasons. It was left to an uncertain future. In 1992, an application was put forward to demolish it. It was refused – but without a long-term plan for its use it was still at risk.

A condition report made it clear just how bad the situation was, and spurred people into action. The Council held discussions with Historic Scotland about the principle of demolishing the larger part of the building – leaving only the façade and the main gables standing.



View of the new central atrium
© Jim Stephenson

In 2007, an agreement was reached to demolish the rear of the building and to erect a substantial steel frame to brace the main elevation and the gables. This allowed more time to consider the options without the immediate threat of demolition.

Following from Dumbarton Town Centre Action Plan, the former Burgh Halls became a key site targeted for development.

West Dunbartonshire Council wanted to move their offices to the centre of Dumbarton. They decided to reuse and incorporate the frontage of the Former Academy into a new office development for 500 people.



Bus Stop

JASM
CHINESE RE

View of the front elevation
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Above: Aerial view of Dumbarton Academy and Burgh Halls held up by a steel frame prior to the refurbishment project in 2015

Below: View of the extension added to the rear of the building © Jim Stephenson



The project involved ambitious proposals to restore the frontage and tower, and create an extension at the rear in a complementary palette of materials. Research gathered from the [West Dunbartonshire local archives](#) and the [HES archive and library](#) turned up old architectural drawings and photographs. These showed historic details of the roof, including the dormer windows – without this information, it may not have been possible to accurately reconstruct them. [Historic Environment Scotland awarded](#) £500,000 to the restoration works.

The new Council headquarters provides a mix of public services and modern office workspace. The historic main entrance has been kept and the restored frontage houses the reception, helpdesk, civic space and training rooms. A modern office development extends behind the frontage

containing three floors of office accommodation organised around a central atrium space which forms the social heart of the building.

In a conscious effort to stimulate the local High Street, no canteen was provided within the building to encourage staff to contribute to the vitality of the town centre.

The project mixed both conservation and new-build elements to secure the future of the listed building. West Dunbartonshire Council in collaboration with [Keppie](#) have successfully saved the historic frontage and formed a new building of civic importance and pride, forming a catalyst for regeneration in the town. An important piece of Dumbarton's heritage has been retained and reused, and is now giving a huge economic boost to the town.



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View of the new Council Chambers
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