

DUNS PRIMARY SCHOOL, SCOTTISH BORDERS

SELECTIVE DEMOLITION CASE STUDY

USE AND ADAPTATION OF LISTED BUILDINGS



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

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Duns Primary School

Demolishing parts of a historic high school to create a modern primary school.

Duns Primary School started life in 1958 as Berwickshire High School. It was designed before the outbreak of the Second World War by [J & F Johnston](#). It is an important example of a 1930s Modernist public building. It still looks strikingly modern now, with a long low frontage, and distinctive box window frames. It is [listed at category B](#).

The building was used for almost 50 years before closing in 2009, when a new high school opened across the road. It stood empty for almost a decade before its doors opened again in 2017.

With no ongoing care and maintenance in this time, the building deteriorated. In the same period, the old Duns Primary School was also under pressure. They needed more space and better facilities, and were looking for a solution.

Scottish Borders Council decided that the old Berwickshire High School was a possible option for Duns Primary. But it was simply too big for a primary school. The only way to solve both problems would be to demolish selected parts of the old High School.

One of the most distinctive elements of the building is its low horizontal frontage. So a key focus of the scheme was to keep that element. This meant losing some of the later buildings at the back, which were not original. But it also meant losing two rear wings which were part of the original structure. This balance meant that the most important parts of the building could be kept, and, most importantly, brought back into use.

More work was needed to the original building. This was an opportunity to increase its energy efficiency by adding double glazing and roof insulation. The new windows had to be thought about carefully in order to find a solution that was sensitive to the listed building.

Thin window frames were used throughout to minimise their visual impact.

The building also needed to be brought up to modern teaching standards. This meant changes to the building's layout – creating new classrooms and rearranging internal spaces.

The new Duns Primary School opened in 2017. [It was designed by Aitken Turnbull Architects](#) in close collaboration with Scottish Borders Council and procured through Hub South East.



Above:
View of the front elevation of the school c. 1955 ©Courtesy of HES (J and F Johnston and Partners)

Below:
View of the front elevation of the school after the refurbishment ©McAteer





Above:
View of the back elevation of the school before the selective demolition ©Courtesy of HES

Below:
View of the back elevation of the school after the selective demolition ©McAteer



It can take up to 450 pupils, and provide them with a high-quality learning environment, with the latest facilities and infrastructure. Reducing the size of the building has allowed its most important elements to be kept; bringing it back into use has ensured its survival in the longer term.



View of the refurbished gymnasium ©McAteer

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Drawing of the Old Berwickshire High School (c.1955 to 1960)
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