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**THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY**  
The champion for Victorian and Edwardian architecture

Paul Orders  
Chief Executive  
Cardiff County Council  
County Hall  
CARDIFF  
CA10 4UW

Your reference:  
Our reference: 2014/03/009

14 March 2014

C2C@cardiff.gov.uk

Dear Mr Orders

**RE: Coal Exchange, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff (Grade II\*, 1884-5 with interior remodelling of 1911, *Ewin Seward and Thomas*)**

Cardiff's Coal Exchange is one of Wales's most important and impressive historic buildings. In its heyday it was the heart of the country's coal trade, which was on an incomparable scale. The building was both symbolic of and the means by which Cardiff achieved its staggering position as the world's leading trader of 'black gold'.

The Victorian Society is extremely and increasingly alarmed by the treatment this remarkably important building continues to receive; concerned at the unwillingness of the Council to engage with or respond to interested parties; and very worried by what appear to be relatively advanced, and singularly harmful, plans for the future of the building.

As you will be aware, the plight of the Coal Exchange and the uncertainty over its future has caused a great deal of concern, among both heritage organisations and the wider public. In the context of this chorus of concern the apparent unwillingness of the Council to engage and the opaqueness of its dealings so far is deeply frustrating. Despite numerous attempts to contact the Council I have yet to receive a substantive response.

The Minutes of the Council's Cabinet Meeting on the 16 January and the Report provided for the Cabinet Meeting on the 29 January answer some questions. They confirm, for example, that the Council is entering into an agreement with the developer Macob Exchange Ltd to undertake a "mixed use development" of the Coal Exchange to create what is described as a "business centre"; they underline what seems to be the Council's conviction that the building is in a perilous state of disrepair; they demonstrate that there has been on-going dialogue with a number of organisations to discuss uses and approaches, including the Heritage Lottery Fund and CADW; finally, they confirm the expenditure of £900,000 on 'contractor costs', 'statutory undertakings', 'professional fees' and 'other project costs'.

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The Investment Prospectus entitled *Time For The Coal Exchange* includes a number of plans and drawings of a projected scheme for the Coal Exchange, which would involve demolishing and rebuilding a large portion of the interior of the building. The drawings illustrate a large glazed roof looming disproportionately over the building's front façade. We are aware that this may not represent a finished or polished design. However, we would very much welcome more information and detail on what is envisaged for the building. We would like to see further plans, drawings and CGI's and we would appreciate the opportunity to comment on these plans at an early stage.

On the basis of the very few illustrations included in the Prospectus we have grave doubts over the project, and not just the details of its design, but about the very approach that seems to have been adopted by the Council and developer and their view of what degree of change and adaptation would be acceptable. To what extent are these plans founded upon a thorough understanding of the building, its history and its significance? The starting point for any redevelopment must be a thorough appraisal of the historic building. A conservation management plan should also be produced. These are not box-ticking exercises to be produced after plans have been drawn up; they are an essential tool in identifying what is significant about the building and developing sensitive and informed proposals.

To date no compelling evidence has been produced to prove that the building is structurally unstable. Appendix 3 of the Cabinet Meeting Report of 29 January, the closest we have seen to anything resembling a structural survey, is a remarkably brief document which serves only to underline the extent of neglect and the shocking lack of maintenance that the building has endured in recent times. We would like to see an independent and reputable structural engineer who specialises in working on historic buildings, produce a thorough structural survey. I would very much welcome the opportunity to visit the building in the near future: could this be arranged?

The main purpose of this letter is to highlight our concerns, and to give the Council an opportunity to respond to them. We would welcome clarification of the present situation, the discussions that have taken place to date and the plans that the Council and Macob are developing for the Coal Exchange.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

James Hughes

**Conservation Adviser**

**Cc**    **Andrew Gregory (Cardiff Council)**  
         **Nigel Hanson (Cardiff Council)**  
         **Richard Cole (Cardiff Council)**  
         **Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cardiff Council)**  
         **Jill Fairweather (Cadw)**  
         **Lucie Carayon (AMS)**  
         **Judith Leigh (SPAB)**  
         **Elaine Davey**