

Developer engaged in hotel plan for ex-wedding venue

Picture: BILL HENRY

SoCo firm to give landmark a £45m new lease of life

■ IAN SWANSON

A HISTORIC city landmark which hosted Scotland's first same-sex civil partnership is set to be given a new lease of life as part of a £45 million hotel development.

India Buildings – which includes the former registry office where Gail Porter got married – has been bought by developers Jansons, which recently completed the nearby £35m SoCo development.

It has also bought adjoining council-owned land in the Cowgate where it plans to build a new multi-storey block, allowing it to create a 220-bedroom four-star hotel.

The hotel entrance will be through the A-listed India Buildings in Victoria Street, but the development will extend right down to the Cowgate.

The B-listed former Cowgatehead Free Church, currently used as a clinic, will be incorporated into the project.

Michael Tomkins, development director at Jansons, said: "India Buildings is an iconic building at the heart of Edinburgh's city centre. The acquisition of this property presents a wealth of options for redevelopment. Originally, the plans were for a hostel. However, we have decided to convert the building into a hotel that will also include dining and licensed facilities.

"This whole area was tenements in the 18th century. We are going to replicate that quarter and bring some new life to Cowgate."

He said the company would be able to draw on its experience of the SoCo development – which includes the 259-bedroom Ibis hotel – and also involved constructing a multi-storey building in the World Heritage Site.



HISTORY: India Buildings where Gail Porter and Dan Hipgrave tied the knot as it is today and, left, in the 1960s

India Buildings dates back to 1864 and is described as a Scots Baronial and Jacobean office block.

Edinburgh-born TV presenter Gail Porter tied the knot with musician Dan Hipgrave at India Buildings in 2001 when it housed the city's registry office. The building also saw Edinburgh's first same-sex civil partnership ceremony in 2005.

Mr Tomkins said certain rooms had special listed protection and their historic features could not be altered.

Most of the building has been lying unused for the best part of a decade, apart from occasional use as a Fringe venue. RBS Real Estate Management, which acquired the property in 2010, sold it to Jansons for an undisclosed sum.

Marion Williams, of the Cockburn Association, said:

He added: "We finished that last December. We have put a similar team together for this and we hope it will be a similarly successful development."

He said it would take about 12 months to pull the plans for the development together and consult with heritage bodies and residents and added that developments of this scale typically took three years to complete.

motored from the Championship, Wolves would top League One and Real Madrid would win the Champions League.

But he needed Germany to triumph to complete the final leg of the accumulator bet he placed last August.

Ahead of Sunday night's

final leg, dad-of-one Rory bet against Germany to ensure he could still make a profit.

As rumours of his potential windfall circulated on the Jambos Kickback website, fellow fans wished Rory all the best.

When Germany won, he went on the site to outline how

the bet had scraped through all season.

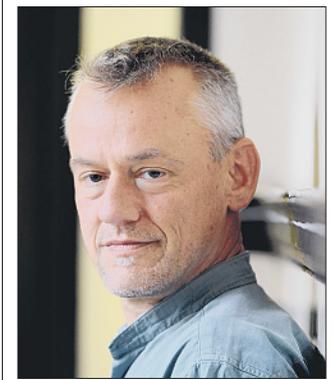
He said: "Heart was racing, especially at thought of pens but whole bet's been right lucky."

"Gerrard slips, Chelsea score and suddenly City get chance of league. QPR down to 10

men in play-off final seemed destined for extra time then Zamoraaaaaa.

"Real Madrid scoring in 93 mins to get extra time."

Sky Bet, who took on Rory's inspired wager, tweeted: "One punter has well and truly #skybetted us."



LEVER: Malcolm Fraser

Call for cash incentives for traders

A LEADING Edinburgh architect, who conducted a national review of town centres for the government, has called for businesses to be given more cash incentives to keep trading and set up.

Malcolm Fraser chaired the National Review of Town Centres, which 12 months ago urged a "town centre first" approach by public bodies in approving new homes and leisure or public facilities.

Now he has called on the government to back up its commitment to the regeneration of town centres with hard cash.

Mr Fraser has urged more radical moves in the areas of rates and taxation.

Business groups have blamed parking and planning restrictions as key factors undermining the revival of town centres.

They say these factors are largely responsible for an average of ten per cent of shops being vacant.

Mr Fraser said: "We need incentives to get development where we want to see it. I would encourage the government to be bolder in using tax as a positive lever to back up this town centre first principle."

He said the existing Business Rates Incentive Scheme, offering councils 50 per cent returns on rates for some areas, could be restructured for town centres and Land Value Tax used to drive changes of use and attract housing developments.

He said he would not like to see these issues put on the "back burner".

Music course hits right note

MORE than 70,000 students from across the world have signed up for an online music course run by Edinburgh College of Art.

Fundamentals of Music Theory will introduce students to the theory of music.

Michael Edwards, a composer who helped create the course, said: "The course should help put the power and tools of Western music theory into the hands of many for whom a traditional classical music education is or was inaccessible."

Hearts fan scoops £83,000 windfall thanks to auf wiedersehen bet

A LUCKY Hearts fan is celebrating Germany's victory in the World Cup final after the 1-0 win netted him £83,000.

Jambo Rory Flynn, 35, had already correctly predicted Manchester City would win the Premier League, Queens Park Rangers would be pro-