

Art school held 'bacon roll' tours despite the risk of fire

Mike Wade

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The Mackintosh building burnt down as it was being reconstructed after an earlier blaze in 2014
CHRIS WATT/GETTY IMAGES

Banks and businesses were regularly invited on fundraising “bacon roll tours” of Glasgow School of Art’s doomed Mackintosh building, despite its inadequate fire safety provision.

Details of the events, which may impact on an insurance settlement according to a leading architect, emerged as the art school published a record of nearly 100 tours of the building undertaken by school groups, professional bodies and politicians.

In a submission to the Scottish parliament, the school said all the events were carried out in line with safety practices agreed with Kier Construction, the main contractor behind the restoration.

Alan Dunlop, professor of architecture at the University of Liverpool, said the tours were “risky for the contractor to agree to”.

He added: “I don’t know why Kier would allow that, unless the school said it would allow them to help with fundraising. What kind of insurance policy must they have had to allow people to visit for bacon roll parties? For the GSA to be so sure that the cost of any replication or rebuild work would be covered by insurers is really just beyond me.”

A £51 million restoration programme was nearing completion following a fire in 2014, when the Mackintosh was completely destroyed in June by a second blaze.

Details of corporate events held in the building in the months before

the fire are contained in December's board papers. One entry reads: "Since mid-October, the GSA development team has conducted eight 'bacon roll' tours of the Mackintosh building with companies and individuals, including Bank of China; Wright Johnston McKenzie; Citizen M/Camron PR; Harper Macleod; Bluebell Grey and Dog Digital."

A further 23 "bacon roll and hard hat tours" were mentioned.

Previously, *The Times* revealed that a "Mackintosh memories tea party" was held in the Furniture Gallery and disclosed that offices were set up in the Janitor's House.

Tom Inns, the former principal, resigned on November 2.

At a previous committee hearing the art school's architects and contractor said the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service "reviewed" the fire safety plan for Category A-listed buildings. However, the service issued a statement to *The Times* emphasising that it did not "approve or validate" the fire plan.

"It is solely the responsibility of the principal contractor to produce a fire and emergency plan," the service said. "Engagement and consultation with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is not a statutory requirement of this process. Furthermore, SFRS does not approve or validate fire and emergency plans."

At the time of the blaze, no fire suppression system had been installed at the Mackintosh building and ducts that helped spread the 2014 fire remained open. A smoke detection system was installed, and the building had a watchman. In an interview, Muriel Gray, the chairwoman of the art school board, claimed the fire plan represented a "gold standard of fire protection on a construction site".

Professor Dunlop said that the fire contradicted any notion that a safety system had been in place. "In retrospect it certainly doesn't look 'gold standard', because the building burnt down," he said.

In a statement the school defended appointing Kier, despite its work at the DG One leisure centre in Dumfries being criticised for "omissions" in fire-stopping.

The school said: "At the time of appointment, the GSA followed a rigorous procurement process and the issues relating from the DG One were not known."

After a report into the leisure centre was published in April, the art school received assurances from Brian McQuade, managing director at Kier Scotland, who said the Mackintosh project was being undertaken by a "different arm" of the company.

Kier declined to comment.

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