



## Case information

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<b>Case ID</b>	300008752
<b>File Reference</b>	HGH/B/LA/387
<b>Name of Site</b>	Cables Wynd House, Cables Wynd, Leith

<b>Local Authority</b>	City of Edinburgh Council		
<b>National Grid Reference</b>	NT 26818 76260		
<b>Designation No. (if any)</b>	LB52403		
<b>Designation Type</b>	Listed Building	<b>Current Category of Listing</b>	A
<b>Case Type</b>	Designation		

<b>Received/Start Date</b>	16/07/2014
<b>Decision Date</b>	30/01/2017

## 1. Decision

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In our current state of knowledge, Cables Wynd House is considered to meet the criteria for listing. It has been listed at category A.

<b>Previous Statutory Address</b>	N/A
<b>Current Statutory Address</b>	Cables Wynd House, excluding ancillary brick walls and lower level car parking block to southeast, Cables Wynd, Leith, Edinburgh

## 2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

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### 2.1 Designation Background

The building is located within Leith Conservation Area.

### 2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

### 3. Assessment

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#### 3.1 Assessment information

Cables Wynd House was visited on 09/09/2014.

The exterior and the common interior spaces were seen during the visit. No flat interiors were seen.

#### 3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

The building was found to meet the criteria for listing. The ancillary walls and car parking are not considered to of special interest in listing terms and are excluded from the listing.

An assessment against the listing criteria was carried out. See **Annex A**.

*The designation criteria are published in the Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 2, pp. 51-53.*

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/historic-environment-scotland-policy-statement/>

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## **ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Listing Criteria\***

Cables Wynd House, excluding ancillary brick walls and lower level car parking block to southeast, Cables Wynd, Leith, Edinburgh

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### **1. Description**

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Cables Wynd House, commonly referred to as the ‘Banana Flats’, was built between 1963 and 1965 to the designs of Alison & Hutchison & Partners with Robert Forbes Hutchison as the senior partner and Walter Scott as the partner in charge. Francis W Tinson was the senior assistant. The contractor for the scheme was J Smart and Co and the structural engineers were Blyth & Blyth. It is an elongated 10-storey slab block of flats with private and public access balconies and is located within the Kirkgate area of Leith, a post-war urban redevelopment scheme built in 3 phases during the 1960s. The building is a modern Brutalist design and comprises a long rectangular plan slab block, oriented on an east-west axis which is canted at an angle towards the middle of the block. It is set on splayed reinforced concrete supports at the ground floor and is characterised by undercrofts and concrete finishing, but primarily by its extensive horizontal elevation that bends in to the precinct acting as a wall which defines its boundary to the north.

In accordance with Section 1 (4A) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 the following are excluded from the listing: ancillary brick walls and lower level parking block to southeast.

It is constructed with an in-situ concrete cross frame with large aggregate pre-cast concrete panel cladding. The building contains 212 flats (204 are 2-bedroom, 8 are 1-bedroom) and are accessed by lifts leading to galleried decks on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> floors. The windows and glazed balcony doors have been replaced by uPVC units. Most main doors to the decks are later replacements.

The interior public circulation spaces were seen in 2014. There are 2 pairs of lifts located to the bend in the plan and two to the east. There are wide galleried decks located to the north side of the building which are enclosed by partially ventilated glazed panels. There is a refuse chute system at each access point at each deck.

### **2. Assessment Against the Listing Criteria** (HES Policy Statement, 2016) Annex 2, pp. 51-52

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Criteria for determining whether a building is of ‘special architectural or historic interest’ for listing under the terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 [[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/9/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/9/contents)]

*To be listed, a building need not meet all the listing criteria. The criteria provide a framework within which judgement is exercised in reaching individual decisions.*

#### **2.1 Age and Rarity**

Leith was the focus of slum clearance programmes between the 1950s and 1970s that resulted in the loss of the historic Kirkgate and the construction of a number of large public housing schemes. The development of Kirkgate is bounded by Tolbooth Wynd (north), Cables Wynd (west), Yardheads (south) New Kirkgate (southeast) and also includes the slightly later Linksvie House, another prominent multi-storey slab block which terminates an extensive courtyard of low rise housing. Cables Wynd House was erected as part of an early phase of the Citadel and Central Leith Redevelopment Area (RDA) which was approved by the Edinburgh Burgh Council in 1963. The block was completed in 1965.

Housing and health was the utmost concern of the state following the upheaval of the Second World War and significant social reforms such as the introduction of the National Health Service were brought forward as a matter of national importance. The aim of building mass housing for communities after the war was seen as an essential and rational solution to address the issues of slum-clearance and housing and health improvement, a concern for Scotland's largest cities from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the garden city movement was a chief preoccupation of reformers who were concerned with improving housing conditions and this thinking informed the emerging programme of town planning and public housing in the first half of the century. Reforms during this period, which included a series of public housing acts led to gradual change and support for social housing.

The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act led to significant changes in housing and planning on a national scale which contributed directly to the welfare of the nation. Regional plans such as the Clyde Valley Regional Plan of 1946, specifically addressed the 'overspill' of population into peripheral communities and directly led to the introduction 'New Towns' to ease pressure on overcrowded cities, and in particular Glasgow. But city officials were keen to ensure that they had control over the management of housing and urban development and identified and promoted comprehensive redevelopment areas (CDAs) within their administrative boundaries as an alternative to regional planning and thus began a large coordinated programme of public-sponsored mass housing. This in turn led to interest in high density mass housing as a natural and essential solution to overcrowding and slum-clearance, epitomised by the enormous group of flats at Red Road, in Glasgow (1962-9 - demolished).

Many of the first high rise buildings being erected were provided by contractors in collaboration with local authority architects' departments, and some early experiments in Scotland include Crathie Court, Glasgow (1946, listed category B – LB51966) and Westfield Court, Edinburgh (1949). By the late 1950s, some of the more architecturally innovative schemes were by architects in private practice. Around this time, the functionalist concepts of the early modernist period of imposed and comprehensive architectural order on society prevalent in the 1930s and '40s and typified by 'all-flats' schemes, was shifting towards socially inclusive architectural solutions and community planning, and by contrast was exemplified by the new

mixed-development scheme. The garden city model was not favoured nor practical in urban areas but neither was the model of high-flats only.

Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation (1947-52) at Marseille, France, is widely recognised as the initial inspiration to this change in philosophy and his large slab block of flats located in a parkland setting, which included shops, leisure and other social amenities as part of the development, was the architectural embodiment of a utopian concept of city living known as the 'ville radieuse' or the vertical city. It proved enormously influential and is often cited as the initial inspiration of the Brutalist architectural style and philosophy, which at Marseille (and at the other Unité schemes found in France and elsewhere) applied a raw concrete aesthetic (béton brut) to maximise the possibilities of new materials and building technologies to achieve its theoretical aims.

Early adopters of the new thinking in Britain were found in London and other large cities such as the housing complexes at the Golden Lane Estate, 1953-63 (listed Grade II\*), the Alton West Estate in Roehampton, London, (1955-8 – listed Grade II\*) 5 long 10-storey slab blocks of maisonettes in a parkland setting, and Park Hill in Sheffield (1957-60 – listed Grade II\*). Park Hill, famously known for its 'streets in the sky' is of importance as the first built manifestation of a widespread theoretical interest in external access decks as a way of building high without the problems of isolation and expense encountered with point blocks. Other expressions of the Unité concept include the Barbican Estate (completed 1963-1982 – listed Grade II), Balfron Tower (1965-7 – listed Grade II), and Trelick Tower (1968-73 – listed Grade II), all in London.

Scotland's cities also responded with ambitious schemes in Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen, all focusing on the ever pressing need for slum-clearance with the help of forward thinking city planners, engineers and housing chiefs, such as Robert Bruce and David Gibson in Glasgow. The Gorbals area of Glasgow, a notorious slum in the south of the city, plagued by overcrowding, saw the erection of multi-storey housing by architects in private practice, including Basil Spence's renowned Hutchesontown C scheme (1961-6 – demolished) and Hutchesontown B in 1958 (altered) by Robert Matthew who was leading Scotland in social housing reform, establishing the Housing Research Unit at the University of Edinburgh in 1959. One of the most distinguished of the tower block schemes in Glasgow was Anniesland Court, Glasgow (1966 – listed category A, LB43034), itself a megastructure with integrated shops.

Like Glasgow, Edinburgh had a slum problem but unlike Glasgow, it didn't have the problem of restricted access to land. Private architects continued to play a role and at Leith a competition was held for the comprehensive redevelopment at Leith Fort, by Shaw-Stewart, Baikie & Perry (1957-66 – now demolished) which included high-rise point blocks with a combination of courtyard houses and a deck access block. The monumentality of many of these schemes is characteristic of Scottish mass-housing developments with Park Hill the only one in England approaching the same scale. With the support of the enthusiastic Edinburgh housing chair, Pat Rogan, the city's busiest period was during the 1960s with a surge of new schemes approved

and begun across the city. By 1965 Edinburgh had finally caught up with Glasgow in terms of its per capita rate of building high flats with around 28 new schemes built as part of this building boom (Glendinning and Muthesius, 1994).

In this wider context, Cables Wynd House is considered an important example in Scotland of post-war multi-storey block of flats. Built within a period of shifting architectural ideologies for social housing, it demonstrates a culmination of contemporary architectural theories closely following the new late modernist model of community planning, including long galleried deck access and forming part of planned inner-city precinct, bearing a close resemblance to the Unité d'Habitation example and other notable near-contemporary English schemes. At the time it was built Cables Wynd House was the largest block of flats in Edinburgh and was possibly the most accomplished architecturally, characterising the 'New Brutalism' in building current to the late 1950s and the 1960s, laying bare the essential materials of a building's construction, and here using reinforced and in situ concrete. Cables Wynd House has not been largely altered since it was first built and as many multi-storey schemes have been demolished in the city and across Scotland, it is understood to be an important surviving example of its type.

## **2.2 Architectural or Historic Interest**

### ***Interior***

The treatment of the interior communal spaces is typically sparse and functional with in situ concrete flooring, ceramic tiling to lift areas for example. Individual flat interiors were not seen and have not been taken into account as part of this assessment.

### ***Plan form***

The orientation of the building on an east-west axis was not the usual recommended arrangement for high flats at this date, with preference given to a north-south alignment to allow for maximum light penetration to the houses. At Cables Wynd House, the architects have resolved the problem of one long elevation being exposed to the north by ensuring that only bedrooms are located to the north of the plan.

Lifts were expensive and in tall point blocks were notoriously slow, therefore based on contemporary building theory, a long plan was chosen so that more houses per floor could be accommodated.

Early deck access flats (of the interwar and early post-war period) were known to have problems with maintaining privacy and reducing noise due to constant foot traffic. The plan set out by the architects at Cables Wynd House has neatly eradicated this inconvenience by setting out the 3 decks at the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> floors only with a repetitive series of 3 main entrance doors entering the flats at deck level (with no bedrooms set next to the deck) as well as accessing the flats immediately above and below. For convenience a pram store and storage is set next to each set of 3 doors.

Edinburgh housing officials who manage the flats at Cables Wynd House have indicated that there are no significant internal alterations to the flats (2014-16).

### ***Technological excellence or innovation, material or design quality***

Cables Wynd House is a good example of Brutalist architecture in Scotland and uses concrete for both aesthetic and practical ends.

In its construction, Cables Wynd House uses a concrete cross wall method which meant that balconies could be recessed within the contour of the building and allowed for a greater variety in architectural pattern for setting out the elevation. As at the Unité d'Habitation, the aesthetic use of repetitive pattern is used at Cables Wynd House to its maximum effect, especially in such a monumental elevation.

The early 1960s was the new age of environmental control and designer-architects, like Alison & Hutchison & Partners were able to incorporate the latest technology to provide convenience, comfort and economy in large housing schemes.

Cables Wynd House is up to date in providing the latest conveniences for mass living which include the placement of bathrooms at the centre of the block because of innovations in ventilation, the extensive use of underfloor heating and a modern refuse shoot system.

Alison & Hutchison & Partners of Edinburgh worked extensively in Central Scotland and the Borders between 1958 and the early 1970s, almost entirely in the public sector and were early adopters of the emerging Brutalist aesthetic. They were responsible for a large proportion of housing redevelopment in Central Leith, including the point blocks in Couper Street (1961-5). Their principal works include the Grangepans redevelopment of Bo'ness, 1958-9, Paisley College of Technology, 1953-63, Woodcroft Telephone Exchange 1958-64 (previously listed at category C - demolished), Napier College, Merchiston Campus, Edinburgh (1964-1); Lynebank Hospital (1965 – listed category B LB52192); St Andrew's R C Church, Livingston (1969-70 – listed category B, LB52188) and St Gabriel's Church, Prestonpans (1965- listed category B, LB52187)

The senior partner for Cables Wynd House, Robert Forbes Hutchison (1908-1976, FRIAS, FRIBA) had a long career as a public sector architect before commencing independent practice in 1950, taking over the practice of his former master Walter Alison. He was former chief architect to the Regional Hospital Boards of Scotland.

Walter Scott (1926-2010) joined the practice of Alison & Hutchison, becoming principal assistant architect in 1958 and principal in partnership in 1960 until setting up his own practice in 1964. He was previously architect to the Regional Hospital Boards of Scotland.

### ***Setting***

Cables Wynd House is situated within a predominantly residential area, surrounded by traditional tenements to the south and west, and contemporary courtyard housing including Linksvie House block of flats, to the north and east, which have been designed as a late modernist architectural set piece in urban planning terms. The immediate setting is directly reflective of the wider urban area with a multiplicity of commercial and industrial uses co-existing within a predominantly residential area, characterised by modern interventions into surviving elements of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century streetscape.

### ***Regional variations***

There are no known regional variations.

### **2.3 Close Historical Associations**

There are no known associations with a person or event of national importance at present (2016).

Cables Wynd House has gained popular interest after it featured in Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*. The flats were the childhood home of the character Simon "Sick Boy" Williamson in Welsh's internationally acclaimed novel. The building and its location has been frequently chosen as a subject for architectural photography and filming. In 2007, the block was used during filming of the television drama 'Wedding Belles', also by Irvine Welsh.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Cables Wynd House is recognised for its contribution to Edinburgh and Scottish culture and its sense of identity as it is regarded both as a positive and negative architectural icon, representing a period of great social reconstruction in Scotland's cities.

### **3. Working with the Principles of Listing** (HES Policy Statement, 2016) Annex 2, pp. 53

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In choosing buildings within the above broad headings particular attention is paid to:

- a. special value within building types*
- b. contribution to an architecturally or historically interesting group*
- c. the impact of a grouping of buildings*
- d. authenticity*

When working with the principles of listing Cables Wynd House has particular interest under a, b, c and d.

- a. Cables Wynd House is among the best examples of post-war mass housing scheme in Scotland and possibly the best of its type in Edinburgh. It was the largest multi-storey block of flats when it was built.
- b. The building is a key component of the comprehensive redevelopment of the Kirkgate area of Leith and ties into the precinct housing and its companion slab block, Linksvie House.
- c. The grouping of the mix-development housing dating from the early 1960s to the mid 1970s has accumulative special interest as group of buildings of a similar type and date.
- d. The building is largely unaltered and retains its early 1960s character. All of the windows and doors have been replaced but this has not had a significant impact on the character of the building.

### **4. Summary of Assessment Against the Listing Criteria\*\***

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Cables Wynd House is among the best of Scotland's post-war mass urban housing schemes and closely follows recently emerging theoretical interest in community planning, using external access decks as a way of recreating the civic spirit of traditional tenemented streets. While Glasgow's housing policies dominated the Scottish debate on housing and slum clearance, the redevelopment in Central Leith was an equally significant achievement by the Edinburgh Burgh Council who in the early 1960s were fully committed to rehousing the city's working classes in high quality schemes but which also addressed the need for high density. It is significant that a private architectural practice led the design, showing the contemporary interest in Brutalist architecture and delivering one of Scotland's most ambitious inner-city developments of its time.

The building is considered to meet the criteria for listing.

## 5. Category of Listing

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Categories of listing are non-statutory and buildings are assigned a category (A, B or C) according to their relative importance following the assessment against the criteria for listing.

Listing at category A recognises the importance of Cables Wynd House within its building type and for its date in Scotland and Britain. It is also an important example of Brutalist design, illustrating contemporary ideals in architecture and planning as well as being an important marker of our social history in the post-war period.

## 6. Other Information

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N/A

## 7. References

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Canmore: <http://canmore.org.uk/> CANMORE ID 137762

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[http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect\\_full.php?id=400256](http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=400256) [accessed 21/07/2016]

## Tower Block

<http://towerblock.org/> [accessed 21/07/2016]

## **Additional information**

City of Edinburgh Council, housing department (2014-16)

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\* This assessment is based on our current state of knowledge and has been prepared for the purpose of consultation or to provide a view on the special interest of a building. This assessment is a consultation document and will form the basis of any new or updated listed building record should the structure be listed. The content of this assessment may change to take into account further information received as a result of the consultation process.

\*\* A building may be found to meet the listing criteria but in some circumstances may not be added to the list. See 'When might Historic Environment Scotland list a building' at <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/listing-scheduling-and-designations/listed-buildings/what-is-listing/>