

23 January 2021

Cllr John Alexander
Dundee City Council

Dear Councillor Alexander

Dundee City Council - City Development Committee - 25 January 2021
Item 9 - Report on Disposal of Dudhope Castle, report no 39-2021

Please reject this proposal as inadequate and premature.

I write as a private individual, a citizen of Dundee, constituent of Dundee City Council and a resident of some 23 years in the Dudhope area, and as someone with some experience and qualifications in historic building conservation.

I was alerted to the proposal to sell Dudhope Castle by the Courier of Thursday 21 January. Curiously, the same day that the City of Edinburgh Council voted to end its contract to dispose of the former Royal High School building to developers who had been intent on developing it as a luxury hotel. You may be aware that this has been a long running and *cause celebre* regarding a crucially important building, and involving a co-ordinated expensive campaign from several of Scotland's heritage bodies. It has reflected badly on the City of Edinburgh Council.

I have read the committee report and this treats the Castle as an office block that is surplus to current requirements rather than as a part of Dundee's cultural heritage. The west parking area is proposed to double as a development site and the only external features noted are 'historic lamp posts and floral garden' and the B-listed well. This is at best muddled. There is no indication in the report of the historical importance of the Castle and its setting to Dundee and its citizens, of any underlying archaeology needs (surely a risk), of its island location within the public park or that it was originally acquired with support from the community and used for the benefit of the community, and was never intended to be council staff accommodation.

That the Head of Democratic and Legal Services confirms that the Council has a legal right to dispose of the Castle doesn't make this proposed sale morally or democratically right.

The Courier report included some of the Castle's history. I think key is that Dudhope replaced the Castlehill Castle, which had been demolished c.1300 during the Wars of Independence (hence the Wallace reference later on). Dudhope then became the seat of the Constable of Dundee (the Scyrmgeours). It later passed via the Crown to the Maitlands / Lauderdale's; then to Graham of Claverhouse or 'Bonnie Dundee', who set off from here to Killiecrankie (significant); and then again via the Crown to and the Angus branch of the Douglas family. It is probably the most significant civic structure of pre-industrial Dundee.

It is shown in Slezer's views of Dundee from the north and east of 1678, with additional tower sections, meaning that it had a larger footprint and its surrounds include important archaeology.

In the 1790s, as Dundee morphed into an industrial town, the Douglas family leased out the Castle for conversion to a woollen mill, which failed, and then as a Government barrack from 1795. This also involved new buildings, since removed, alterations and extensions. In the 1850s the town leased the upper section of the park as a public park, known as the Barrack Park. Then in the 1890s, the Government lease expired and the property reverted to the Earl of Home (the descendent of the Douglasses).

Lord Home initially wanted to demolish the Castle and feu the entire park as housing sites. This was not conducive to the Council (or the neighbouring feuars), and they instead sought to acquire the Castle and park for Dundee. A reduced price of £31,700 was negotiated, but the Dundee Police Commissioner's contribution was capped at £20,000, so the balance was raised through an appeal by Lord Provost Mathewson to the neighbouring feuars and to several 'generous minded citizens'. The list of some 36 contributors includes many of the leading industrial and commercial families of the day.

At the Council meeting on 14 November 1892 the Lord Provost reported that 'It was gratifying to them as a Commission that they had been enabled to complete the purchase of the Barrack Park, and that they had so many liberal-minded citizens ready to come forward and do what they could to help in any good object that was in the interests of the community of Dundee'. The purchase was of the 'whole ground including the barrack buildings and grounds'...'not what is usually known as the Barrack Park'. Entry was Whitsunday 1893.

To commemorate the purchase the Dundee Advertiser ran a feature on the history of Dudhope Castle, republished in the Dundee Year Book of 1893. It began: 'The acquisition of the Barrack Park by the citizens of Dundee has put them in possession of one of the most notable baronial antiquities of this locality, if not indeed in Scotland', and concluded Dudhope was 'almost the only relic of Dundee which has a continuous history, intimately connected with the progress of the burgh, from the days of Wallace, six hundred years ago, to our own time'.

The 1890s assessment of the cultural and community value must be reviewed in the context of the ongoing destruction of the mediaeval burgh over the same period. This regard for Dudhope Castle by the Council of the day was unusual and it is indicative of the importance of the Castle and surroundings to Dundee. Recognition of the built heritage was then still very limited and restricted. Dudhope was also then selected as an appropriate location for preserving the 1744 Overgait well head.

This was also a time when the city was expanding and public open spaces were valued for health reasons. It's ironic today to see a Council proposing to eat into an inner city public park for private development, 130 years later.

The Castle was used for much of the early 20th century by community groups and it contained clubrooms and meeting rooms; organisations using it were benevolent societies, youth groups, Scout troupes, cycling clubs, and church groups; other uses included bugle and pipe band practises, boxing lessons and art exhibitions. There was an aviary and monkey house circa 1930s and play equipment outside. In 1959 Lord Provost Hughes launched an

appeal to fund necessary repairs and a fundraising booklet was produced by Sir Francis Mudie and James D Boyd detailing its history, including an architectural survey by (now Professor) David M Walker, dating much of it to the 1590-1600 period, and interpreting missing and older detail.

Little though was done in the way of repair until c.1984 Dundee District Council commissioned a restoration programme utilising Manpower Service Commission funded labour - providing job creation and training skills for the long termed unemployed. It was a solution for achieving work involving a very limited budget, and it likely saved the Castle, but perhaps at the cost of more experienced skills and craftsmanship. There were also delays and set-backs. Some of the barrack alterations were reversed and lime harling to the stonework was reinstated (but later partly overcoated with standard masonry paint). The investment was about £1 million, of which the Council contributed about £80,000. Thereafter the Castle was marketed and put to various office type uses, including as a business school for Abertay University, and latterly DCC offices.

The committee report indicates that it was vacated two years ago and is to be marketed. But it is vague about possible new uses, suggesting: "hotel, offices, serviced apartments, or residential" and suggesting that new build could be as at the former DRI and Park School.

The report is lightweight and seems rushed. The possible uses are varied and reliant on planning guidance. None suggested seem appropriate. If the hotel market is saturated then a new hotel will create vacancy issues elsewhere. Hotels need modular layouts. Subdividing for housing would be regrettable and likely irreversible and there are ample housing conversion opportunities elsewhere. There is no accompanying planning brief.

There is also no accompanying conservation plan that might detail the historic importance, and provide weighting to the different elements, leading to assessments of significance. The 'formal garden' is modern, the well is the 1744 Overgate Wellhead which is the last of the Dundee wellheads and ought to be returned to the city centre; the lamp posts are throughout the park, so must be post 1893 and most don't work. The archaeology and features such as the gun emplacement aren't mentioned. A conservation plan would appraise all these factors - and more.

Will the public still be allowed near the castle, or in the 'formal garden'? Will there be added walls or fences? Will there be an impact on park trees? Will there be an impact on the driveway through? Will noise (sometimes considerable) from the skatepark irritate the new owners / users? A planning brief might explain more.

Dundee is successfully reinventing itself as a visitor destination but planning for what the priorities will be post-pandemic is obviously currently very difficult. So postpone this.

In order to retain visitors lured here by the V&A and the new very exciting initiatives that are planned we need other attractions. Verdant, Discovery, DCA and McManus are some, but with niche appeal. Unicorn and the Transport Museum, if properly funded, will help. Dundee lacks any of the kind of heritage visits that appeal to cultural tourists. Why do visitors come to Scotland? - published figures indicate it is for our scenery and our built

heritage; other countries have art galleries, historic ships, museums, etc. - we have castles and stately homes.

Dudhope is Dundee's Castle and there must be huge potential in providing a visitor attraction there. Dundee also has castles at Claypotts, Broughty and Mains, all underused and offering potential for localised cultural tourism. Then there is Camperdown House, regarded as Scotland's finest neoclassical country house and where William Burn perfected Victorian country house planning. And also lacking a productive use (hotel use would destroy its significance). The nearest equivalents are House of Dun near Montrose or Falkland Palace, or Hill of Tarvit near Cupar, all a day out from Dundee (which is my point).

If Dundee can justify building major new facilities to attract visitors then it can justify developing the facilities it already has to sustain these visitors - and importantly it can also attract similar expertise to develop and bring in the funding and utilise local technology skills. There is less of significance inside the Castle, so this makes alterations easier for accessibility and provides open spaces for exciting new interactive displays (Dundee's gaming industry could help). Dudhope could be themed to interpret (say) the early Jacobite risings - so no need to go to Killiecrankie, Inverness or risk the midges on Skye. The scheme that was initiated for Camperdown in association with National Galleries of Scotland in the mid 1990s included returning original furniture and lending the NGS's maritime collections as a country house art gallery. It was put on hold until McManus was redeveloped, could be dusted down and reinterpreted to add appeal (an interactive Battle of Camperdown?). And so on.... (obviously just ideas).

But if DCC can't make these suggestions work, Dudhope still needs a use that respects its history, that welcomes the curious who wants to see inside, and one that doesn't involve subdividing it and break it into lots so that such a folly cannot be reversed.

Please reject the current report as premature and ask your officers to explore other options. Consult with the community. Check the comments on social media (I'm noting lots). If coming back with proposals a conservation plan, a planning brief and an options appraisal for different uses and ownership options would allow a better-informed decision.

Best regards

Adam Swan (MSc IHBC FSAScot)