

Perth Common Good Fund Committee – 27 February 2013

UPDATE ON USE OF THE SOUTAR HOUSE

Report by Executive Director (Education and Children's Services)

ABSTRACT

This report updates the Perth Common Good Fund Committee on the development and current use of the Soutar House following renovations as a result of severe weather damage. The Committee is requested to note the content of the report and to approve the further exploration of longer term solutions for future use of the property.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1.1 Note the contents of the report and current arrangements for use of the property; and
- 1.2 Approve the undertaking of an options appraisal for the future use of the property.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 William Soutar was a poet whose work puts him alongside many of the great Scottish writers, and interest in his life and work remains high. The house in which he spent most of his life until his death in 1943 is a semi-detached 1 ½ storey bungalow facing northeast in the Craigie area of Perth and was gifted to the then Perth Town Council in 1958. The house, including boundary walls, gates and railings is listed Category B and forms part of the Common Good of Perth. Further detail of the gifting of the House is included in **Annex A**.
- 2.5 Upon its transfer to the Council in 1958, the Soutar House was used as the residence for the Chief Librarian and subsequent similar posts, however since the 1980s the house has been used as the residential and working base for a succession of Writers in Residence working with the Perth and Kinross Library service.
- 2.6 The most recent Writer in Residence used the property just once or twice a week, having a home in Perth and the property has been empty since March 2010 when this post came to an end.
- 2.7 Also using the property on a regular basis are the Friends of William Soutar Society (FoWSS), a group formed in 2007 to:
 - *promote the work of William Soutar, making his name more familiar to the general public in Scotland and beyond*
 - *bring his poetry to a new readership using a variety of channels*

- *gain wider recognition of his contribution to the Scots language and its literature*

FoWSS meet monthly in the House, supporting and promoting Soutar related events and activities, running a website (<http://www.williamsoutar.com>) and supporting the Soutar Writers Group.

- 2.8 In December 2010 the property suffered widespread damage on the ground floor caused by frozen and burst pipes. The renovation work to repair the damage was extensive and was completed in July 2012.
- 2.9 Early in 2012, an approach was made to the Perth and Kinross Libraries and Information Service by the Scots Language Centre (SLC), which currently operates from an office within the AK Bell Library and has excellent working relationships with the service and the wider Council, seeking the opportunity to make use of the Soutar House to support the development of their activities and engagement with a broader range of audiences. The SLC is a national organisation, with international links, founded in Perth and funded by the Scottish Government to:
- *provide online services and information hub for those interested in the Scots Language (<http://www.scotslanguage.com>)*
 - *Administer the Cross Party Group on Scots Language with the Scottish Government*
 - *Undertake advocacy and promotion activity*
 - *Provide advice and guidance to local authorities, agencies and organisations*
 - *Undertake research, promote and share best practice*
 - *Provide support for translation activities*
- 2.10 A small cross-service working group was convened to look into the feasibility of the proposal and through discussions a number of additional options were identified which require further, more detailed exploration. In the meantime, it has been agreed that SLC may make use of the property, along with the continued use by the FoWSS for a period of 12 months. The SLC will retain their base at the AK Bell but make use of the Soutar House for additional events, seminars and workshops as appropriate, booking their access through LIS, who continue to oversee the property.

3 PROPOSALS

- 3.1 It is proposed that an options appraisal on the future use of the property is undertaken during 2013/14, including a review of the use made by SLC and FoWSS with a view to identifying recommendations on the long term future for the property. A cross-Council group, led by Education and Children's Services will make recommendations on future use to the Perth Common Good Fund Committee by August 2013.

4 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The Head of Democratic Services, Head of Finance, Head of Legal Services, Head of Technical Services and Head of Human Resources have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 All running costs for the property are contained within existing budgets within Education and Children's Services and The Environment Service.

6 COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN OBJECTIVES 2009-2012

- 6.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2009-2012 lays out five Objectives which provide clear strategic direction, inform decisions at a corporate and service level and shape resources allocation. They are as follows:-

- (i) A Safe, Secure and Welcoming Environment
- (ii) Healthy, Caring Communities
- (iii) A Prosperous, Sustainable and Inclusive Economy
- (iv) Educated, Responsible and Informed Citizens
- (v) Confident, Active and Inclusive Communities

This report relates to Objective No. (iv) and (v)

- 6.2 The report also links to the Education & Children's Services Policy Framework in respect of the following key policy area:

- Maximising Resources

7 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EqIA)

- 7.1 An equality impact assessment needs to be carried out for functions, policies, procedures or strategies in relation to race, gender and disability and other relevant protected characteristics. This supports the Council's legal requirement to comply with the duty to assess and consult on relevant new and existing policies.

- 7.2 The function, policy, procedure or strategy presented in this report was considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (Eq1A) with the following outcome:

- i) Assessed as **not relevant** for the purposes of EqIA

8 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a legal requirement under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 that applies to all qualifying plans, programmes and strategies, including policies (PPS).

However, no action is required as the Act does not apply to the matters presented in this report. This is because the Committee are requested to note the contents of the report only and the Committee are not being requested to approve, adopt or agree to an action or to set the framework for future decisions.

9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Soutar House is an important cultural asset for the City of Perth, however it is recognised that there is a need to review the current use and identify future use of the property with a view to identifying longer term solutions which support the future vision for the City and agreed corporate priorities.

JOHN FYFFE
Executive Director (Education and Children's Services)

Note: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

Contact Officer: Helen Smout, Service Manager – Culture
ext 76282 HSmout@pkc.gov.uk

Address of Service: Pullar House, 35 Kinnoull St, Perth PH1 5DG

Date: 1 November 2013

If you or someone you know would like a copy of this document in another language or format, (on occasion only, a summary of the document will be provided in translation), this can be arranged by contacting *The Communications Manager*
E-mail: ecsgeneralenquiries@pkc.gov.uk



Council Text Phone Number 01738 442573

APPENDICES

Annex A

The Gifting of the Soutar House

The Gifting of the Soutar House

William Soutar's father, John Soutar, left his estate, including the Soutar House to his adopted daughter, Evelyn Auty, with a further instruction that the house should go to Perth Town Council under certain conditions. The conditions were:

- The plaque (on the front of the house) referring to William Soutar should remain in place
- The Council should retain the property 'in all time coming'
- The room on the ground floor where William Soutar spent the last 14 years of his life should be shown to any person or persons who apply to visit the room at all reasonable times
- The portrait of William Soutar which hangs in the house shall remain in its present position
- The house should be occupied by a Council official or by a suitable tenant identified by the Council

There was also a further condition that in the event of any contravention of the above then the house should revert back to the family beneficiaries of the estate.

Following the abolition of the feudal system these conditions cannot be enforced , however consideration of the future use of the property should include intent to maintain the spirit of the initial gifting and the family's wishes where practicable.

