

REPORT TO: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 23 APRIL 2003

SUBJECT: NORTH EAST OF SCOTLAND PRESERVATION TRUST (NESPT)

BY: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1. Reasons for Report

- 1.1 To respond to a request from Aberdeenshire Council to re-instate local authority core funding for the North East of Scotland Preservation Trust (NESPT).
- 1.2 To consider alternative arrangements for this Council's future involvement in Building Preservation partnerships.

2. Background

- 2.1 NESPT was set up in 1985 to 'promote and encourage the protection and preservation of places and buildings of historic and architectural interest in the north east of Scotland'.
- 2.2 The Moray Council has been a member of the NESPT since its inception, originally with Grampian Regional Council and the District Councils, latterly with Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council. The Council is currently represented by Councillor Hogg, and one officer from Planning and Development.
- 2.3 Over the years since 1985 the Trust has renovated some 40 properties, and secured investment of over £1.3m in buildings of architectural or historic interest throughout the area.
- 2.4 Until 1999, the Trust was funded by the local authorities, in both cash and staff time contributions, through which it was able to secure grants and sources of other monies, and provide a 'rolling fund', as renovated buildings were sold on. The Trust employed a Project Officer, and was assisted administratively by the Councils.
- 2.5 It is set up as a company limited by guarantee, with Member and official representation from each authority, and private individuals.
- 2.6 In 1999, The Moray Council offered to renew its £2,000 annual contribution to core funding, on condition that the other authorities did likewise. This did not however materialise, and for the past 4 years, the Trust has survived without core funding, and without the benefit of a Project Officer. It has been unable to undertake any substantive new work.

- 2.7 NESPT owns one remaining "asset" which, coincidentally, is in Moray, namely Aberlour East Lodge, an A-grade Listed Building in very poor condition. The Trust has owned this property for 12 years but has been unable to promote a renovation and re-use. In January of this year, the decision was taken to apply for permission to demolish the Lodge, however last minute negotiations are continuing with Historic Scotland. The Trust also has a small surplus account due largely to the goodwill of contractors and architects who have not received payment for some works undertaken in recent years.
- 2.8 In 2001, the Moray representatives proposed to form a Moray Trust, affiliated to, but independent of the NESPT. The Council of Management of the Trust did not accept this arrangement, and as a result, two of three Moray representatives resigned.
- 2.9 In December 2002, a meeting of the 3 authorities, and Trust members, convened under the chairmanship of Aberdeenshire Council, discussed options for the revitalisation of NESPT. Aberdeenshire Council have subsequently agreed to provide two annual sums of £5,000 to the Trust "to enable it to prepare a detailed business plan and obtain administrative support for a review of its project."
- 2.10 Requests for similar supportive involvement have now been made to both Aberdeen City Council and the Moray Council.

3. The Proposals

- 3.1 The Aberdeenshire proposal aims to establish a 3-year business plan, with a development programme in years 2 and 3, by which time projects will be self-sustaining. It is recognised that Council staff time cannot be dedicated to this work, and that a Project Officer is essential. Annual costs of £35,000 are estimated, with the three Council inputs proposed at £5,000 per annum, the balance being found from trusts and other public sources.
- 3.2 Aberdeen City has indicated it is unlikely to pursue this option, and is considering its future in the NESPT. It has recently been awarded ring-fenced funds from the Scottish Executive to set up a City Heritage Trust with Historic Scotland.
- 3.3 For some months, officers in the Moray Council have been considering options for a different approach to built heritage and building preservation, and as part of this process Members will recall a report to the Environmental Services Committee of February this year, highlighting the particular opportunities to secure Heritage Lottery funding in Moray, for such work.
- 3.4 In addition, since the inception of the NESPT, the emphasis on sources of external funds for Moray has shifted towards the HIE area (a factor which strongly influenced the move for a separate Moray Trust two years ago).

3.5 The Highland Buildings Preservation Trust (HBPT) based in Inverness, operates throughout the area of the European Structural Funds HIPP area, which includes all of Moray. It is a well established Trust, with a full-time Project Director, and it has been involved with private owners in assessing potential projects in Moray. Discussions have been held with Highland BPT to examine the potential of a contractual partnership, in which individual projects in Moray might be undertaken by the Trust on behalf of the Council.

3.6 In terms of building preservation in Moray there is unlikely to be sufficient justification for an independent Moray Trust, employing its own Project Officer. Therefore it is proposed that, before entering into a core-funding commitment to NESPT, Moray Council pursue the possibilities of a partnership arrangement with Highland BPT on the basis of contracting projects as and when they are identified, and when funding packages can be put in place.

4. Consultations

4.1 Consultations with the other local authority partners of NESPT have taken place prior to this report.

4.2 Consultations are ongoing with HBPT.

4.3 Councillor Hogg, as NESPT member, is in agreement with the recommendations of this report.

5.1 Staffing Implications

5.1 Present staff time commitment to NESPT amounts to attendance at approximately 6 meetings per annum. Proposals for any alternative arrangements will be contained within the staff deployments of the Key Service Plan for Planning and Development.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are currently no budget commitments to NESPT. Any future contracted project work would be proposed for match-funding using the 'Heritage' element agreed for the Corporate Economic Development Activities budget.

7. Corporate Plan

7.1 The Corporate Plan commits the Council to protection of its natural and built heritage, and these proposals aim to provide a more practical and realistic commitment to preserve buildings than at present.

8. Recommendations

8.1 The Committee is recommended to:-

- (i) instruct officers to investigate the possibility of a contractual partnership with Highland Buildings Preservation Trust, as described in paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6, and to report back to this Committee on potential arrangements.**
- (ii) To defer a decision on core funding of North East of Scotland Preservation Trust, as proposed by Aberdeenshire Council, until submission of the report referred to in (i) above.**

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Background Papers:

Ref: DJL/BDH