
Consultation on Heritable and Moveable Asset Registers for former Burgh of Duns

Report by Principal Solicitor

Duns Common Good Fund Sub Committee

13 September 2022

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is to advise on the outcome of the recent consultation under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, and to seek approval of the final Common Good Register for Duns.**
- 1.2 Under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 the Council is required to establish and maintain a register of property which is held by the authority as part of the Common Good ("a Common Good Register"). Before establishing a Common Good Register, the Act requires the Council to publish a list of property that it proposes to include in the Register and consult the public on this list.
- 1.3 The Duns Common Good Sub-Committee approved the draft asset register in December 2021 and agreed to the commencement of the public consultation. The consultation ran from December 2021 to 31 March 2022,
- 1.4 The Sub Committee now requires to consider the responses received to the consultation, and approve the final register to be recommended to Council for publication.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **I recommend that the Sub-Committee:-**
 - (a) Notes the consultation responses and officers' comments thereon, as set out at Appendix 1 to this report;**
 - (b) Approves the contents of the final list of heritable and moveable property assets held by the Council within the former Burgh of Duns, as set out in Appendix 2;**
 - (c) Agrees to recommend to Council the said final asset list for publication as a completed Common Good Register for Duns.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 the Council is required to establish and maintain a register of property which is held by the authority as part of the Common Good ("a Common Good Register"). Before establishing a Common Good Register, the Act requires the Council to publish a list of property that it proposes to include in the Register and to consult the public on this list.
- 3.2 A draft list was agreed by the Sub-Committee in December 2021 and a public consultation on that list took place from 21 December 2021 to 31 March 2022. The consultation was available on-line via Citizens Space, with paper copies of the lists being made available on request. The Council advertised the consultation on its website and through each of its Local Area Partnerships. In addition, details of the consultation were issued to every Community Council in the Scottish Borders.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The consultation published the draft list of assets, together with a location plan for each of the land or building assets. The consultation asked for comments on (i) whether a proposed asset should be included as part of the Common Good; or (ii) whether there should be other assets included in the Common Good asset list.
- 4.2 There were 65 responses to the consultation and 4 of these responses related to Duns. The comments received included a response from Duns Community Council. The responses are set out in Appendix 1.
- 4.3 In considering the responses received, officers from the Council's Legal team have liaised with Estates and Finance colleagues in order to determine the provenance of the assets concerned. The legal tests have then been applied to the information gathered in order to form a view as to the assets' common good status. The legal tests can be summarised as follows:
- All property or land owned by the Burgh in 1975 *may* belong to the Common Good;
 - If the title deeds of the asset contain a 'common good declaration' which clearly indicates that the property should be held for the people of the Burgh, it is likely that the asset belongs to the Common Good;
 - If there is evidence, from the title deeds or the Burgh records that the asset was acquired for a statutory purpose, or using statutory powers, the asset is unlikely to be part of the Common Good.
 - If the asset is part of a separate Trust, it will not form part of the Common Good.
 - Moveable items (such as art and artefacts) again may be Common Good if owned by the Burgh in 1975 and any document relating to the transfer or donation should be considered to determine the intention of the acquisition.
 - Items used principally for the administration of the Burgh (such as minute books) will not be part of the Common Good, whereas ceremonial items such as robes and chains are likely to form part of the Common Good.

- 4.4 If the Sub-Committee agrees that all consultation responses have been appropriately considered, the next step in the process is for the Sub-Committee to approve the asset list set out at Appendix 2, as being the final Common Good Register for Duns. Any changes from the draft register approved in December have been highlighted.
- 4.5 Following approval by the Sub-Committee of the final Register, Council approval will be sought for publication of the final Registers for all of the Common Good assets in the Scottish Borders. The aim is to have the full Scottish Borders Common Good Asset Register published by the end of September 2022.
- 4.6 It is possible that following this process, further assets may be identified as being Common Good, and where that is the case, the Council will update the Common Good Asset Registers. The Registers will similarly be updated if existing property is disposed of or reclassified. The Council will also ensure that the Common Good Asset Registers are reviewed on a regular basis, and at least every five years.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

There are no direct costs attached to implementing any of the recommendations contained in this report. However, the Council has a duty to ensure the accuracy of the Council's accounts. It is therefore important that any assets which should properly be classified as being Common Good are contained within the Common Good Registers, and therefore the Common Good Accounts. However, any assets owned by the Common Good but operated by the Council, remain in the Council's accounts with appropriate disclosure notes included in both sets of accounts.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

The Council's primary aim is to ensure compliance with Part 8 of the Act in respect of Common Good assets. If the Council fails to comply with the duties contained in Part 8 of the Act it will be in breach of the legislation and the Council may be subject to adverse public comments and legal challenge. The risk is mitigated by considering this report and the Council carrying out the actions detailed herein.

5.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

Steps were taken to ensure that the consultation was accessible to all. These steps included the publication of the consultation in paper copy which was made available on request.

5.4 Sustainable Development Goals

There are no economic, social or environmental effects in accepting or rejecting the recommendation

5.5 Climate Change There are no effects on carbon emissions in accepting or rejecting the recommendation.

5.6 Rural Proofing

This is not a new policy matter.

5.7 Data Protection Impact Statement

There are no data protection implications resulting from the proposed publication of the Registers of Common Good.

5.8 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes required to the Council Schemes of Administration or Delegation.

6 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Director Finance & Corporate Governance, the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director People, Performance & Change, the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

Director of

Signature

Author(s)

Name	Designation and Contact Number
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Background Papers: Nil

Previous Minute Reference: Nil

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