

## Tron Kirk – Future Proposals

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### Finance & Resources Committee

11 November 2008

#### 1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 This report requests approval to advertise the Tron Kirk on the open market, seeking offers and expressions of interest from potential operators to take a long lease of the premises on condition that they restore the fabric of the building and incorporate a facility for the public to view the archaeological remains of Marlin's Wynd.

#### 2 Summary

- 2.1 The Tron Kirk is a building of immense importance from an historical and architectural point of view, as well as being a landmark and notional halfway point on Edinburgh's Royal Mile.
- 2.2 Formerly the centre of Edinburgh's Hogmanay, the building has struggled in recent years to find a role in keeping with the significance and prominence of its location and architectural quality.
- 2.3 Due to the substantial funding gap between the original estimated cost of £1.275m and the current estimated cost of £2.16m, it has not been financially viable to proceed with the proposal to provide an interactive Visitors Centre on the ground floor and a café / restaurant on a new mezzanine floor, which was granted planning permission and Listed Building consent in January 2007.
- 2.4 The Tron Kirk, a grade "A" listed building, requires essential works to preserve the fabric to prevent it falling into disrepair. The Council also needs to determine how the property may best be utilised to provide a facility that will enhance the experience of visitors to the Old Town. By placing the property on the open market the Council will be able to determine if there is scope for private enterprise to take forward the regeneration of the Tron Kirk, using various Grants and private finance without the need for Council funding.

### **3 Main Report**

- 3.1 Construction of the Tron Kirk began in 1637 on the existing site, adjacent to the "Trone", a large weighing machine. The original church was larger than the current one as the east, west and south sides had to be shortened to accommodate construction of South Bridge and Hunter Square, which took place between 1785 and 1787. The church steeple was destroyed by fire in 1824 and various internal alterations were undertaken during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.
- 3.2 The Tron ceased to be a parish church in 1952 when it was purchased for the nation by the Secretary of State and presented to the City of Edinburgh. The building is A listed which reflects its architectural and historical importance.
- 3.3 The archaeological remains (Marlin's Wynd) located within the Tron Kirk are nationally significant, being a time capsule of late 16<sup>th</sup> / early 17<sup>th</sup> Century life, providing probably the only opportunity to fully interpret late medieval domestic archaeology within the Edinburgh World Heritage site.

#### **Existing development proposals**

- 3.4 The current development proposals received CEC Executive authority in July 2005 and provides for the Tron Kirk to be converted to provide an interactive Visitor Centre on the ground floor with provision for a café / restaurant on a new mezzanine floor. The intention was to lease the refurbished building on the open market, with potential tenants asked to make a premium payment that would have been used to offset the gap in funding provided by the Cities Growth Fund (CGF).
- 3.5 Planning permission and Listed Building consent were granted on 31 January 2007 on the basis that work commenced within 5 years, that the toilets being created within the building would be open to the public for a minimum period of between 08.00 am and 9.00 pm daily and the café / restaurant being able to trade longer hours. The project was halted in February 2007 due to a funding gap created by an inordinate rise in construction costs.
- 3.6 The original project cost had been estimated at £1.275m but the total project cost at February 2007 had risen to an estimated £2.16m, excluding VAT, which included a sum incurred for professional & statutory fees of £260,540 (March 2008) funding for which came from a grant of £650.000 from the Cities Growth fund. This fund has now come to an end as a separate capital grant programme.
- 3.7 The project remains on hold with little or no sign of sufficient funds being available either from the Council or Grant aid bodies. During this time however, a full archaeological dig and report of findings has been completed.
- 3.8 The scheme in its current form is very unlikely to come to fruition due to an overall lack of funding in the public and Grant aided sectors. A possible source could be the National Heritage Lottery fund but this would require the CEC to

match any grant awarded and given current expenditure constraints this would be unlikely.

- 3.9 To ascertain the views of the private sector, EDI has been asked for its views on the development opportunities for the property. Its report has indicated that there is a difficulty in increasing the proposed density of use and have stated that a coffee shop / restaurant may not be viable. EDI has suggested the sale of the building as an option or, should the Council prefer a developer lead option, then a more intense planning use would be required. This could still prove difficult to deliver in terms of financial return.

#### **Future development proposals**

- 3.10 In order to test the market it is proposed to seek, by tender, expressions of interest from a development partner to refurbish the Tron Kirk, which would also include the following:-

- A lease of up to 50 years in length
- An undertaking that the archaeological remains of Marlin's Wynd would still be available for the public to view
- That the Tron Kirk remained as a catalyst for servicing tourism in the Royal Mile.

- 3.11 Edinburgh World Heritage Trust is keen to see the Tron Kirk preserved and is assisting the Council in appointing a Conservation Accredited Architect to prepare a Conservation Statement to RIAS stages C and D in order to prepare the case for the restoration of the external fabric (including stonework, roof repairs and windows etc) This work will assist in any grant application for funding.

- 3.12 Subject to Committee approval it is proposed to commence the competition for a development partner as soon as possible.

#### **4 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There is currently no income generated from this property whilst the Council is liable for the maintenance of a Grade A listed property. This repair liability would be transferred to the development partner.

- 4.2 Dependant on the use of the premises and the length of lease agreed, it is possible that an income could be generated for the Council.

#### **5 Environmental Impacts**

- 5.1 There are no adverse environmental impacts arising from this report.

#### **6 Conclusions**

- 6.1 In view of the current budget restrictions and in an effort to bring the property back into a beneficial use in the absence of Council funding, it is

recommended that the property should be advertised for let on the open market to test the market for developer interest.

## 7 Recommendations

- 7.1 Given the current lack of public funding for the restoration of the Tron Kirk, it is recommended that the property be advertised for lease on the open market to see if private enterprise can deliver a proposal to restore the property with a sympathetic end use that will enable the public to view the archaeological remains of Marlin's Wynd.
- 7.2 To note that a further report will be submitted to Committee once the tendering exercise is complete.



**Dave Anderson**  
Director of City Development

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<b>Appendices</b>	None
<b>Contact/tel</b>	Peter Watton, Estate Manager – Property Development. Tel No 0131 529 5962 – email: peter.watton@edinburgh.gov.uk Richard Willson, Surveyor – Property Development. Tel No 0131 529 4624 – email: richard.willson@edinburgh.gov.uk
<b>Single Outcome Agreement</b>	Supports National Outcome 10 - “We live in well designed sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need”.  Supports National Outcome 12 – “We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations”.
<b>Wards affected</b>	11, City Centre
<b>Background Papers</b>	Report to Executive of the Council dated 21 June 2005