

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: CHARLOTTE DUNDAS REPLICA
Meeting: EXECUTIVE
Date: 24 February 2015
Author: CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek approval to decommission the Charlotte Dundas replica vessel at a cost of £5,570. The Collections Agreement between the Council and Falkirk Community Trust (the Trust) requires Council approval to dispose of any item in the collection such as the Charlotte Dundas.

2. CHARLOTTE DUNDAS

- 2.1 The attached report received from the Trust details the history of the replica vessel from creation to its present condition. Falkirk Council owns the vessel and the Trust pays £1,820 per annum for it to be stored in an Arbroath boat yard. The vessel is in a very poor and dangerous state. Although there have been a number of attempts to secure a future for the vessel over the years, these have proved unsuccessful. The Trust has recommended that the vessel is decommissioned at a cost of £5,570. The costs of decommissioning can be met from existing Council budgets.
- 2.2 The Friends of Charlotte Dundas have also asked for the wheel and the name plate to be salvaged and they will arrange for these items to be uplifted from the boat yard.
- 2.3 There have been initial discussions between the Friends of Charlotte Dundas, the Trust, Scottish Canals and the Council to establish a permanent memorial. Although these discussions have not proved conclusive, there is a shared aspiration to see wider recognition of William Symington's engineering achievements.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That Members approve:
- i) the decommissioning of the Charlotte Dundas replica vessel and the cost of £5,570 is met from existing Council budgets,
 - ii) that the Vessel's wheel and name plate are salvaged on the understanding that the items will be uplifted from the boat yard by the Friends of Charlotte Dundas.

Chief Finance Officer

Date: 5 February 2015

Contact Officer: Danny Cairney

FALKIRK COMMUNITY TRUST

Subject: CHARLOTTE DUNDAS REPLICA
Meeting: EXECUTIVE
Date: 24 February 2015
Author: CHIEF EXECUTIVE, FALKIRK COMMUNITY TRUST

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Board of Falkirk Community Trust on 21 August, the members recommended the decommissioning of the Charlotte Dundas replica at a one-off cost of £5,570 and the Trust now seeks Falkirk Council's approval for this work to go ahead.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The vessel which is a $\frac{3}{4}$ scale replica was begun by Falkirk District Museum as a Youth Training Scheme project in 1987. By 1990, however, with the vessel only partly complete (with only hull and paddle wheel), in the absence of detailed original drawings, a sustainable long term development plan and funding, the project was abandoned.
- 2.2 The replica was put into storage at Mackay's Boat Yard in 2005 where it remains in an increasingly precarious state.
- 2.3 In 2010 some work was undertaken to explore options for retaining the vessel and preserving it as a local monument. Officers from Falkirk Council Community Services and Economic Development visited Port Glasgow where a replica of Henry Bell's Comet was being restored using a funding mix of Future Jobs Fund, Fairer Scotland and the Port Glasgow Common Good Fund. This project included an employment training element delivered by Ferguson's Shipyard with overall project management by Inverclyde Community Development Trust. The total value of the project was in the region of £300k.
- 2.4 In Falkirk, the specific skills required to develop the replica were not relevant to the existing local jobs market and, combined with the lack of a viable end use, site, revenue budget and operator/manager, it was not possible to secure funding for a training project. The search for funding was made more challenging in the economic climate of the time particularly in the context of reductions to the Council's own capital budget.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Falkirk Council owns the vessel and Falkirk Community Trust pays £1,820 per year for it to be stored in the Arbroath boatyard. Over the years, the budget for supporting the vessel has been cut to zero so the berthing remains a burden for the Trust.
- 3.2 None of the characteristics that made the original two versions of the Charlotte Dundas unique are evident in the replica: it has no steam engine – indeed, it lacks any form of propulsion and, although it was berthed, first in the basin at Grangemouth then at the Falkirk Wheel, it only floated, it did not move. Also, no plans exist for the original and, as such, any replica is likely to be the result of educated guesswork. This diminishes the heritage value of the replica and raises the question of whether its preservation is really is the best way of commemorating and promoting understanding of Symington’s engineering achievement.
- 3.3 Late last year, Ken Hutton, a marine engineer based locally, became interested in the potential of the replica and has set up the Friends of the Charlotte Dundas with a view to finding common ground and a way ahead. He has continued to refine his proposals which are now focussed on finding a land base for the replica, with interpretation.
- 3.4 However, to date, the Friends have been unable to secure a site for the vessel, project partners or either capital or revenue funding to support the restoration, installation and future management of the replica. Neither the Trust or Helix Business Plans have capacity to support the project.
- 3.5 Similar projects to refurbish other replica ships (Bell’s Comet and the Vulcan) have proved to be costly and complex as well as requiring ongoing maintenance to ensure they do not fall back into disrepair. It is worth reading this article <http://www.maritime.org/conf/conf-walker.htm> which cautions against the creation/restoration of replica ships without a clear purpose and a robust business plan.
- 3.6 The frames and bottom of the vessel are sound but above the waterline the vessel is now in such a poor condition (see attached photos) that it is unlikely to survive another winter. Following a visual inspection, MacKay’s have written to the Trust expressing concern that the vessel is becoming increasingly dangerous, that parts could become detached in high winds and, as the timber becomes increasingly decayed, the vessel is also a liability if any unauthorised people get into the yard and climb on it. MacKay’s are no longer able to store the boat in its current condition and the Trust lacks the knowledge, expertise and budget to take over the care of the vessel.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Over the years there have been many attempts to secure a future for the Charlotte Dundas replica. However, the combination of a lack of a clear end use, the difficulties of securing both capital and revenue funding and, ultimately, the replica's lack of authenticity have proved to be insurmountable barriers and have resulted in the vessel continuing to languish in Arbroath. A decision needs to be taken which separates the replica from William Symington's engineering achievement.
- 4.2 Trust staff will continue to work with the Friends of the Charlotte Dundas to ensure that appropriate ways are found to commemorate Symington's engineering achievement and its importance to Grangemouth and in the wider context of Scotland's role in the Industrial Revolution.
- 4.3 MacKay's state that a decision has to be taken either to commence restoration or decommission the vessel. With no project plan or funding in place, the latter option appears to be the only option available at this time. The vessel is an asset of the Council.

5. RECOMMENDATION

5.1 The Council is asked to approve:

- i) the decommissioning of the vessel be at a one-off cost of £5,570

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Chief Executive
Falkirk Community Trust

Date: 2 February 2015

Appendix 1: images of Charlotte Dundas (15/6/14)



