

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Chief Officer – Citizen, Culture & Facilities

Cultural Committee: 29 June 2022

Subject: Dumbarton at 800 – Octocentenary of the Royal Burgh

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This paper outlines planned activity by the Arts and Heritage team to mark the octocentenary of the Royal Burgh of Dumbarton between July 2022 and July 2023.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** The Committee is asked to note the contents of this paper and agree support for the activities and approach described.

3. Background

- 3.1** The foundation charter for the Royal Burgh of Dumbarton was sealed by Alexander II on 8th July 1222 in Jedburgh. Dumbarton's geographical importance had already lent the settlement status, and the town's royal standing continued to grow its reputation.
- 3.2** During 1922 the 700th anniversary of Dumbarton was commemorated in the town, with a number of images held in the Council's local history collection of parades and celebrations. Similarly, in 1972 public events were held to mark the town's 750th year.
- 3.3** Prior to the Covid 19 pandemic a Dumbarton 2020 committee had been formed by representatives from the local community; colleagues from Historic Environment Scotland (HES); and colleagues from West Dunbartonshire Council to take forward plans to celebrate the town of Dumbarton. It was hoped that a successful celebration in 2020 would lay the foundation for a subsequent festival of Dumbarton during its 800th anniversary year in 2022.
- 3.4** The challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic ultimately saw festival plans for 2020 postponed into 2021, before ongoing Covid restrictions caused the Dumbarton 2020 project to close.
- 3.5** In the interim, HES progressed plans for the return of its *Rock of Ages* event in Pier Park next to Dumbarton Castle in 2022, with the octocentenary of Dumbarton a central theme for the event programme.
- 3.6** Following the Council's successful Levelling Up Fund bid, Council officers are progressing plans to see Glencairn House on Dumbarton High Street

transformed into a combined museum and library facility. A key element of the museum brief for Glencairn House is to tell Dumbarton's stories.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** On 11 June 2022 HES delivered a successful *Rock of Ages* event in Pier Park next to Dumbarton Castle. As planned, the event programme focused on the 800th anniversary of Dumbarton as a royal burgh, featuring characters, stories and activities all designed to bring the past to life. Dumbarton's history from the medieval period to the present day was celebrated.
- 4.2** Although wider event planning for the octocentenary has been constrained by the legacy challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic, officers from the Arts and Heritage team have continued to develop a programme of activity designed to bring focus to Dumbarton's history and the key objects held in the Council's museum collection that help tell the town's stories.
- 4.3** Launching in July 2022, a series of events and activities will be delivered over the course of the 12 months from the 800th anniversary date, with the shared objective of bringing focus to Dumbarton's local, national and international history. Activity will be delivered both online and in person, beginning with a social media series entitled 'Celebrating Dumbarton'.
- 4.4** The programme will engage young people in local schools and early learning centres through a series of workshops and activities to inspire learning on the area's proud history focused around Dumbarton's Town Centre, the Rock and medieval castle. This will culminate in the production and exhibition of a series of creative outputs alongside a video exploring the story of Dumbarton through the eyes of its young people. An intergenerational project will be undertaken between young people and elderly residents in the area to support learning and build relationships and there will also be engagement with community groups. The anniversary will be incorporated within the Doors Open Day in Dumbarton, walking tours will be delivered in and around the town to promote the history and heritage of the area and the anniversary will feature as part of this year's Booked! Festival in the area's libraries.
- 4.5** A new local history collecting campaign will be launched to complement and augment the ongoing 'covid collecting' initiative being taken forward by the Arts and Heritage team. Citizens of Dumbarton will be asked to contribute photographs of their favourite Dumbarton places, accompanied by captions that give context in the form of an anecdote or memory that connects people and place.
- 4.5** In early 2023 a selection of these newly donated photographs, and their accompanying narratives, will form an exhibition in Dumbarton Heritage Centre that celebrates today's Sons and Daughters of the Rock and their ties to the town of Dumbarton.
- 4.6** To bring focus to the wealth of the Council's museum collection – and to highlight the opportunity of the Glencairn House project to celebrate

Dumbarton's rich history and heritage – the Arts and Heritage team will run a series of 'object in focus' sessions between Dumbarton Heritage Centre and 16 Church Street.

Under the umbrella of '8 for 800', these sessions will showcase eight objects that contribute to a narrative stretching back hundreds of years. This will include Dumbarton's early Christian 'Skellat' Bell; medieval charters, including one signed by James VI of Scotland supporting the witch-hunts that gripped Scotland in the sixteenth century; the town's Tron Weights; and items from the Dumbarton glassworks. Citizens will have the opportunity to see these objects up-close and learn about Dumbarton's history.

- 4.7 Throughout the anniversary year, officers from the Arts and Heritage team will continue to work with colleagues across the Council to maximise opportunities to celebrate Dumbarton's history and heritage, in the context of its octocentenary. To this end, the events programme will remain responsive and adaptive, and officers will actively pursue opportunities to engage as wide an audience as possible with Dumbarton's stories and the museum objects held in trust by the Council.

5. People Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct people implications arising from this report.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1 Any costs associated with the activities described above will be met from existing revenue budgets.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1 Should the opportunity not be taken to celebrate Dumbarton's rich history and heritage in its 800th year, there is a risk that Council projects underway to improve the High Street; develop the town's tourism offer; and highlight the area's rich history and heritage will not be maximised.
- 7.2 There is a reputational risk to the Council should an endorsed programme of activity to commemorate Dumbarton's octocentenary not be taken forward.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Screening identified that no further action was required.

9. Consultation

- 9.1 The proposed events programme described above has been developed by officers from the Arts and Heritage team, with input from colleagues across the wider CCF service area.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** The proposals within this report support delivery of efficient and effective frontline services that improve the everyday lives of residents.

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Background Papers: N/A

Wards Affected: Dumbarton Ward; Leven Ward