



Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1620](#)

Main Petitioner: Colin Fraser on behalf of Friends of the Museum of Fire

Subject: Museum of Fire

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to meet with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to discuss the future of the Museum of Fire, including its collection and location, in the context of the National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries.

Background

The Museum of Fire is currently situated in the former headquarters of the Lothian and Borders fire service on Lauriston Place in Edinburgh. The building was completed in 1900 and functioned as a working fire station until 1988. It has been [Category A list building](#) since 1987.

The building ceased to operate as the HQ for Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade when the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service was established on 1 April 2013.

The [Museum of Fire](#) tells the story of how Edinburgh developed the World's first municipal fire brigade in 1824, following the [Great Fire of Edinburgh](#). The Museum showcases a variety of equipment and appliances from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as older artefacts which chart the development of firefighting over more than 400 years in an interactive tour.

The museum also houses a mock-up of an Edinburgh close which allows the visitor to experience the conditions during the Great Fire of Edinburgh.

The museum is open Monday to Friday between 10.00 and 15.00.

On 30 September 2016, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service [announced](#) that the building on Lauriston Place was to be sold to the University of Edinburgh.

The news release also promised that the Service would shortly announce its plans for a new home for the Museum. It expects the Museum to move to a purpose-built location within the City of Edinburgh. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has committed to funding the restoration and curation of the artefacts in preparation for the move to their new home.

The University, which will take ownership at the beginning of 2017, [plans](#) to use the building as part of Edinburgh College of Art's plans to transform the area into a hub for arts and culture.

Scottish Government Action

The Museum has been the subject of a number of parliamentary questions in Sessions 4 and 5. The responses set out the Scottish Government's position on the future of the Museum and of the collection currently housed there:

S5W-02680: Gordon Lindhurst, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, Lodged: 13/09/2016

To ask the Scottish Government whether it has considered appeals made to it by the Friends of the Museum of Fire in Edinburgh to retain the museum in the former Central Fire Station at Lauriston Place in Edinburgh.

Answered by Annabelle Ewing (26/09/2016):

Yes. The Scottish Government has been mindful of the appeals made by the Friends of the Museum of Fire in Edinburgh, and recognises the importance of Scotland's firefighting history, and the role of the Museum in telling this story. The location of the Museum is a matter for the Board of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

SFRS has committed to retain the Museum of Fire within the City of Edinburgh and will be announcing its new location soon.

S4W-30577: Alison Johnstone, Scottish Green Party, Lodged: 09/03/2016

To ask the Scottish Government whether it considers that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's intention to relocate the Museum of Fire in Edinburgh is in line with the Scottish Government's policies on the historic environment.

Answered by Paul Wheelhouse (18/03/2016):

The decision to relocate the Edinburgh Museum of Fire is a matter for the Board of the Scottish fire and Rescue Service (SFRS)

The museum is currently housed within the SFRS property at Lauriston Place, Edinburgh. This building is listed at category A, and as such the local planning authority, in this case City of Edinburgh Council, must give special regard to the character of the listed building if proposals for change of use or alterations are being considered. The decision to grant or refuse planning permission and listed building consent is for the local authority in the first instance, although Historic Environment Scotland are a statutory consultee for applications which impact upon historic environment assets.

Although SFRS intend that the building at Lauriston will be sold, the Museum of Fire would not be lost to the city with the contents being retained, protected and relocated in a new site elsewhere and that SFRS would seek to improve the accessibility of the collection to increase the level of patronage.

S4W-29695: Cameron Buchanan, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, Lodged: 04/02/2016

To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of (a) the benefits of keeping the Museum of Fire at Lauriston Place in Edinburgh compared with the potential cost savings from using a different location and (b) public opinion regarding its location.

Answered by Paul Wheelhouse (03/03/2016):

The future of the Lauriston Place building and Museum of Fire are decisions for the board of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).

We recognise the importance of this historical collection, which highlights the valuable role this country has played, and continues to play, in protecting people from fire and other emergencies. If a change in the use of Lauriston Place proceeds, SFRS is committed to finding a new home for the Museum of Fire collection in Edinburgh, which ensures continued access by the public, and indeed opportunities to improve access, and a chance for the collection to grow and develop.

S4W-29578: Sarah Boyack, Scottish Labour, Lodged: 29/01/2016

To ask the Scottish Government whether it is aware that the contents of the Museum of Fire in Edinburgh will be put into storage when it is closed in May 2016 and what its position is on the reported lack of a plan to reopen it in Edinburgh.

Answered by Paul Wheelhouse (12/02/2016):

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) has no plans to put the Museum of Fire collection in storage. The SFRS is committed to finding a new home for the collection in Edinburgh and is currently in discussion with the City of Edinburgh Council and Museums Galleries Scotland to explore possible solutions.

Scottish Parliament Action

A couple of motions have been lodged, but not debated:

S5M-01500: Gordon Lindhurst, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, Lodged: 16/09/2016

That the Parliament calls on the Scottish Government to reconsider the sale of the former fire station on Lauriston Place in Edinburgh, which

houses the Museum of Fire; recognises the historical significance of the building, which was built in 1900 as the Central Fire Station of Edinburgh Fire Brigade and is the last surviving Victorian fire station in the UK; further recognises the role of the museum in telling the story of James Braidwood, who founded the world's first municipal fire brigade in Edinburgh in 1824; considers that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service decides on measures to control its budget following the move to a single Scotland-wide service in 2013; notes the role that Historic Environment Scotland, which is a public body established to investigate, care for and promote Scotland's historic environment, plays as a statutory consultee for applications such as this; understands the concerns that local people have, including conservationists and the local community council, that their proposals to take over and manage the running of the museum in its current location, for example through the setting up of a trust, have not been listened to; notes that 5,349 people have signed a petition to stop the sale of the building, which it considers signifies the strength of feeling regarding the issue; calls on the Scottish Government to consider the issue and whether to undertake a feasibility study to assess the merits and potential for different ways to keep the museum at the building, for example through the setting up of a trust; commends all involved in the campaign who have shown tremendous passion for the issue, and wishes them all the very best in the pursuit of their goal.

**S4M-15247: Alison Johnstone, Scottish Green Party, Lodged:
05/01/2016, Fallen on 23/03/2016**

That the Parliament notes reports that the building housing the Museum of Fire at Lauriston Place in Edinburgh may be deemed surplus to the requirements of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service; believes that this signifies a threat of closure; notes that the building was constructed in 1900 as the Central Fire Engine Station of Edinburgh Fire Brigade; believes that the building is of great historical significance to the city and the country as a whole; welcomes efforts by campaigners to persuade the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Museums Galleries Scotland to save the building for development as a world-class national Museum of Fire and as a tribute to James Braidwood, the first Firemaster of Edinburgh, and wishes these campaigners every success in securing a future for the Museum of Fire in Edinburgh.

Francesca McGrath
Senior Researcher
13 October 2016

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