

SAVING LIBERTON BANK HOUSE

October 2004

Our local literary landmark, Liberton Bank, is well on the way to being restored, but sadly the outcome is far from ideal. The planning process has again failed to give adequate protection to historic Nether Liberton.

The 18th-century cottage at the western edge of the Cameron Toll shopping centre (next to the filling station) was the boyhood home of author Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, and it was here that he wrote his first stories. The significance of this connection was soon recognised by the City and by Historic Scotland, and this eventually led to the defeat of plans to build a McDonalds restaurant on the site.



The Cockburn Conservation Trust had offered to restore the house for use by a local special needs school, Dunedin School, but the owner of the land since 1991, Kilmartin Properties, was not prepared to release the site. Kilmartin owned the whole of the Cameron Toll site until early 2003 when it sold the shopping centre building for £75M. However, it retained the Liberton Bank plot and has been intent on developing as much of the site as possible.

In the Association's March 2004 Newsletter, Councillor Fred Mackintosh described the resulting planning application. The house was to be restored for Dunedin School, but the major portion of the garden was to be occupied by a modern medical centre for an existing general practice on Mayfield Road. Although we achieved some minor amendments, this plan was approved by the Council's Planning Committee in the summer. There is as yet no funding for the medical centre.

There are certainly benefits in the scheme. Liberton Bank house, which is now in very poor condition, will be properly restored. And Dunedin School will at last be adequately housed in appropriate premises - for which they are to be congratulated.

However, on the negative side, the new practice building will be enormous - two stories high and with a footprint more than twice the size of the refused McDonalds building - and it will dominate the site. The old house will be physically isolated from the rest of Nether Liberton, and access to it will only be over the shopping centre car park. All these were reasons accepted by the Council for refusing the earlier applications.





It seems shameful that a special needs school should be denied the use of the precious garden ground that surrounds the house. In spite of our objections, we were unable to prevent the small front garden being reduced to accommodate a walled 10-car park for the surgery staff.

The final complication is that the Council now plans to route the new tram line across the shopping centre car park immediately in front of the house. Since the line will be at the level of Liberton Road, it will either be on a high embankment or on a bridge.

Although the house itself is now likely to be saved – and for this we must give thanks – its environment will be severely compromised.

Dr. Allen Simpson