

KING'S PARK DEAL HAILED AS 'HISTORIC'

Johnathon Menzies

Local control is guaranteed

A deal securing the future ownership of Stirling's 900-year-old King's Park was this week hailed as "historic" by several involved in the long-running saga.

The complex outline arrangement secures ownership of King's Park for Scottish Ministers free of charge while ensuring local control and management of the land through a 150-year ground lease to Stirling Council for a nominal rent - meaning money from the city's common good fund is not required.

Elected members gathered at a lengthy meeting on Thursday were also told that the local authority and community groups have plans to create a new city park on the land with the potential to stage events further down the line.

The agreement also secures the future of the golf course as it includes a 150-year under-lease from the council to

Stirling Golf Club. The club will pay £400,000, to be passed to the Crown Estate.

Stirling Council leader Councillor Corrie McChord said: "This is an historic deal for the city of Stirling. Local control of this important land on the western approach to the city has been secured.

"It allows us to take forward our plans to create a new city park that will greatly enhance the city's amenities and the heritage setting of its castle."

In a statement, Stirling Golf Club said: "We are delighted. This agreement provides the members of the club and the community with a security that will allow the King's Park and golf course to be enhanced and enjoyed in the future by everyone."

Following the meeting, King's Park Community Council said: "We strongly welcome the objective to transfer single ownership of the entire original park to Scottish Ministers, which would return this ground to its rightful importance as part

of the historic castle complex. KPCC has campaigned for this over the past five years and the success in raising the profile of King's Park amongst leading academics and historians, amongst others, has undoubtedly contributed to the willingness of all parties to achieve this end.

"We are also relieved that the common good fund remains untouched and, although it still rankles that the CEC still demand payments from Stirling Council, at least some of the pain is taken out of it by these payments being deferred instalments over a long period if necessary."

The community council added: "The anomaly is that, while the CEC admit the importance of the park in that they ultimately will transfer it at nil cost to Scottish Ministers, this contradicts their earlier actions where they assessed it as simply a piece of commercial property with long leases to extort money for it."

The Crown Estate's Alan

Laidlaw joined the chorus of support and declared: "We are delighted that, after many months of discussions with key parties, we have worked together on a possible way forward that has the potential to ensure a lasting benefit to the people of Stirling, giving local control while respecting the historic value of the site."

Secretary of State for Scotland Michael Moore MP added: "I am pleased to have been able to facilitate this historic deal. It achieves what the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Select Committee recommended - ownership of the land by Scottish Ministers - while ensuring local control and management that will result in the creation of new public assets for Stirling."

Historic Scotland will now consider the detailed legal implications for Scottish Ministers, while the council and the Crown Estate will work on other aspects of the outline agreement.