

The Herald

Row over sale of historic royal park

The Crown Estate has been criticised over the sale of a historic Scottish royal park.

A land expert and a Scottish minister have supported community concerns over the sale of King's Park in Stirling, an ancient stretch of land that includes the popular park, Stirling golf course, Gowan Hill - once a place of execution - and Back Walk.

Stirling Council and Stirling Golf Club are to pay £600,000 for the land, a royal park since the 12th century, amid concerns it could be sold privately and redeveloped.

Andy Wightman, writer and land reform specialist, said the sale should be investigated as he believes the land is already publicly held.

Bruce Crawford, the Stirling MSP who is also Minister for Parliamentary Business, said aspects of the sale appeared "daft".

The row will now be aired publicly at a meeting tomorrow night in Stirling.

The Crown Estates Commission, the administrative arm of the Crown Estate, became responsible for the park in 1956, but in practice it is managed by Stirling Council.

Mr Wightman said the CEC should not sell as it paid nothing, and prior to 1956 it was specified as being "held in trust on behalf of the Scottish people".

He added that Stirling Castle and King's Knot, on the same land and already managed by Historic Scotland, were transferred to Scottish ministers in 1999 as part of a handover of 26 pieces of Crown land and buildings "in recognition of their historic nature" and to clarify administrative responsibility. This included Holyrood Park in Edinburgh and Linlithgow Palace and adjacent loch.

The current proposal is for the Crown Estate to sell King's Park to a new public trust for £600,000 to be financed by a £450,000 payment from Stirling Golf Club for a 175-year lease and £150,000 from the Stirling Common Good Fund, a coffer reserved for use only regarding land owned by the people.

Mr Wightman said there has been inadequate public consultation and consideration of the national interest in the site.

Harry Whitelaw, chairman of King's Park Community Council, called on

the Scottish Government to intervene, saying: "We are unclear about what real benefits there are in this proposal.

"We have doubts about why anyone should spend £600,000 on paying for the park when the rest of the land - Stirling Castle and the King's Knot - were transferred to Scottish ministers nine years ago for nothing."

Alan Laidlaw, of the Crown Estate, said it is "required by law to deliver best value from its assets", and that by establishing a trust to look after the area, "the people of Stirling are guaranteed future enjoyment and local control of these public spaces and recreation areas".

A spokesperson for Historic Scotland said that "Crown land remains entirely a matter for the Crown Estate".

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By BRIAN DONNELLY

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