



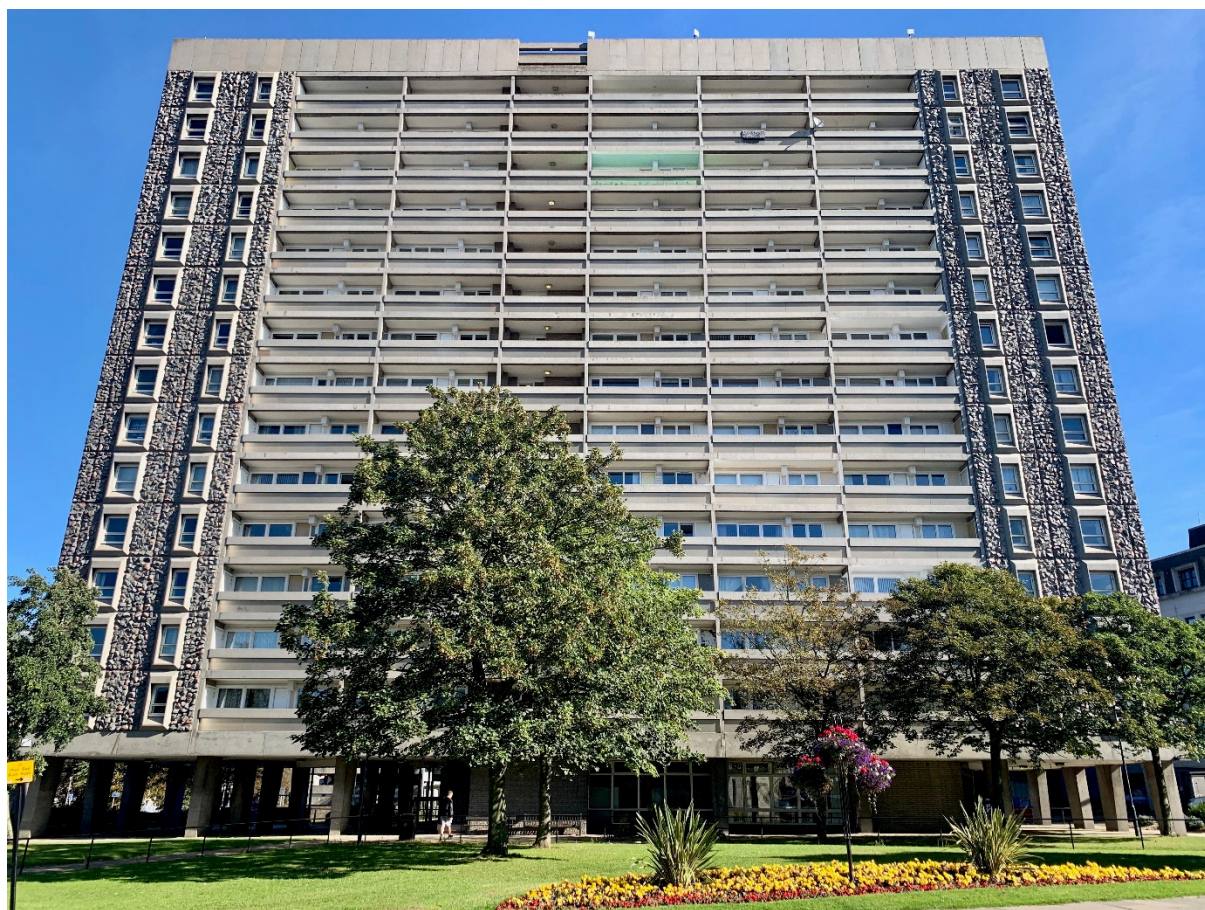
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## Summary Report

### Consultation on the proposed listing of eight inner-city multi-storey blocks of flats, Aberdeen

Consultation period: 14 October 2019 – 24 January 2020



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**Designations  
Heritage Directorate  
Historic Environment Scotland  
17 December 2020**

## Summary Report

### Consultation on the proposed listing of eight inner-city multi-storey blocks of flats, Aberdeen

#### Background to the listing proposal

1. Listing is the process that identifies, designates and provides legal protection for buildings of special architectural or historic interest as set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997. We use the [Designations Policy and Selection Guidance](#) (2019) to make decisions about what becomes listed. For more information about listing and how we list buildings see our [website](#).
2. In 2018, we received an application to consider listing eight multi-storey blocks of flats in Aberdeen city centre from Professor Miles Glendinning, a professor of modern architecture and a specialist in social housing and tower blocks who is based at the University of Edinburgh. The following buildings were proposed for listing:
  - Gilcomstoun Land
  - Seamount Court
  - Porthill Court
  - Marischal Court
  - Virginia Court
  - Thistle Court
  - Greig Court
  - Hutcheon Court
3. We researched and assessed the listing application and found that the Multis were among the best of their building type surviving in Scotland. Our assessment can be found here: <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/decision/500002119>.
4. Aberdeen City Council's corporate landlord (factors), as joint owners of the Multis wrote to all private owners of the flats in September 2019 to explain that HES would soon be consulting on the proposed listing of the buildings. Of the 839 flats in the Multis over a quarter are privately owned.
5. When considering buildings for listing we normally consult those directly affected by the listing, usually the owner, occupier or tenant and the local authority. In the case of the Multis we wanted to carry out a wider consultation because of the large number of people living in the flats who might be affected by the listing and the anticipated level of public interest in the proposal.

#### The consultation period: 14 October 2019 to 24 January 2020

6. The consultation period was initially for 6 weeks from 14 October to 25 November 2019. It was extended to 24 January 2020 to allow for additional meetings with residents and council officials. The extension also allowed for consideration of a

feasibility report on Gilcomstoun Land commissioned by the Corporate Landlord for Aberdeen City Council which was due for submission before the end of the consultation period.

### **Written consultation**

7. On 14 October HES wrote to all 839 households in the 8 Multis as well as to the commercial lets located next to Seamount Court, Gallowgate about our proposal to list the Multis at category A. The consultation included:
  - a report of handling
  - an assessment against the listing criteria
  - photographs and maps showing the proposed extent of listing for each site
8. These documents were also published on our website and promoted through our social media channels (Twitter and Facebook).
9. At the same time written consultation also took place with:
  - Aberdeen City Council (including the Corporate Landlord, Strategic Place Planning, elected council members, and relevant community councils)
  - Aberdeen City Heritage Trust
  - The Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland

### **Drop-in events at Catherine Street Community Centre, Aberdeen**

10. Face to face consultation took the form of four public drop-in events over two days (28 October 2019 and 11 November 2019, 2-4 pm and 7.30-9 pm). At the drop-in events we had a small exhibition about the architecture and history of the multi-storeys in Aberdeen and multi-storey social housing in Scotland and the UK. We also used these meetings to explain the listing process and how listing will affect residents, owners and managers. Officials from Aberdeen City Council's planning and housing (factoring) department were also on hand.

### **Meetings**

11. Several meetings were also held with stakeholders about the proposed listing:
  - 12 November 2019, meeting with Aberdeen City Council's Strategic Space Planning team
  - 27 November 2019, meeting with City-wide Multi-storey Network (attended by around 15 representatives from various multi-storey blocks across the city of Aberdeen. There were two representatives from Greig Court [one of the blocks being considered for listing]).
  - 17 January 2019, meeting with Corporate Landlord, Aberdeen City Council
  - 17 January 2019, meeting with Elected Members, Aberdeen City Council
  - 8 October 2020, case resumption meeting with Corporate Landlord and Planning Team, Aberdeen City Council

## Media interest

12. The listing proposal was publicised in the local press before the consultation started and there has been further media interest throughout the process. See Annex A for a selection of social media comments.

## Responses to consultation

13. Outwith the meetings which were held, there were 62 responses and interactions to the consultation. Out of these 62 responses, 36 of them were from residents.

Communications received	Face to face contact	Total recorded responses
26 (12 residents)	36 (24 residents)	62
		In favour of listing 13 (4 residents)
		No fixed views 37
		Objection 12 (4 residents)

14. Of the 12 objections to listing, two were based on the respondent's personal preference about the building's architectural style. The remaining objections were concerned with the perceived constraints on maintenance, repair and future upgrading, and in particular with heating facilities. Many responses overall raised questions about how listing would affect future maintenance and repair.
15. Of those in favour of listing, most agreed that the buildings were of special architectural and historic interest and those who were residents noted that they enjoyed living in the buildings.
16. In terms of the objections we were able to clarify that:
- The inside of the buildings is of less interest in listing terms and it is largely how they look from the outside that is important.
  - Like-for-like repairs and routine maintenance do not require listed building consent and can proceed as they normally would regardless of the listing.
  - We support the district heating initiative and listing will not prevent these types of projects.
  - We would like to work with the local authority on an energy efficiency pilot study to explore how the Multis can be more energy efficient and have agreed to scope this project in 2021.
  - We have supported the planning authority in the preparation of a draft listed building consent guidance document to support the heritage management of these buildings.
17. A selection of the consultation comments can be found in **Annex A** at the end of this report.

18. Consultation responses were also received from:
- Aberdeen City Council Development Management (Planning). They did not object to the reasons for listing and agreed with our assessment. However, they did ask us to consider compiling a more detailed assessment of the buildings and to provide specific guidance on the management of post-war buildings before a final decision about listing took place.
  - Aberdeen City Council's corporate landlord did not object to our findings that the buildings were of special architectural or historic interest. However, as a majority owner of homes and structures within the properties proposed for listing, they raised several concerns related to the future viability of the Multis.
  - Elected members, through Aberdeen's Chief Executive, objected to the proposed listing on the basis that listing placed a burden on the local authority and tenants in terms of finance, maintenance and future flexibility. They also had concerns about the listing process and asked us to delay listing.
19. **The full text of these consultation responses and our replies can be found on our website.**

## Conclusion

20. The aim of the consultation was to engage with people with an interest in the Multis about why we think they meet the criteria to become listed buildings and to answer questions about what listing means. In terms of the special architectural or historic interest of the Multis we did not receive any comments which put our findings into doubt. We answered many questions about what listing means and were able to provide reassurance on a variety of topics.
21. We have offered to work with the local authority on an energy efficiency pilot study to explore how the Multis can be more energy efficient. We have also begun to work with Aberdeen City Council's planning department to produce a conservation management plan for the flats and guidance for residents. Our programme of making a photographic record of the Multis and other post-war social housing in Aberdeen will continue and the results will become part of the national archive held on our website. We will also be supporting the Aberdeen City Heritage Trust to develop a community engagement project about the Multis.
22. A decision about listing is expected to be taken in January 2021. Should listing take place owners, occupiers and tenants will be notified. There is a statutory right of appeal against listing the grounds for which are that the building is not of special architectural or historic interest. Appeals are made to the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division of the Scottish Government ([www.dpea.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.dpea.scotland.gov.uk)) and must be made within three months of the notification of the decision. More information about this can be found on our website.

## Annex A

### Selection of consultation comments

In favour of listing		
Respondent type	Comments	Communication type
Interested party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seamount; Porthill; Marischal; Virginia Court; Gilcomstoun...are incredibly powerful architectural compositions, surely worthy of Category A listing.</li> <li>The harshness of the materiality and the boldness of the forms is contrasted by an incredible delicacy in the detailing, particularly seen in the fine concrete work and the elegant faceting of the pilotis.</li> <li>The presence of granite rubble work in both the facades and the hard-landscaping of all the estates is a clear nod to the local vernacular, something which is often not seen in Scottish brutalist housing estates.</li> </ul>	By email
Interested party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A precedent for listing such structures has been set by similar flats in Edinburgh.</li> <li>The flats are important in the social history of Aberdeen.</li> <li>The flats have a strong connection to Aberdeen City Architects' Department.</li> <li>Quality of construction, especially the use of appropriate local materials including granite facings.</li> <li>Integrated designs incorporating other housing units, car parking and shops.</li> <li>The flats are outstanding examples of 'brutalist movement' architecture.</li> </ul>	By email
Resident (owner)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I own a flat in this building and I would like to add some of my arguments in favour of listing.</li> <li>The design of the building makes for very comfortable living. The design of the windows is very successful in giving outstanding views to sea and hills.</li> <li>The stone cladding of Thistle Court gives it an attractive and interesting appearance, unlike any multi-storey I have seen elsewhere.</li> <li>Aberdeen, unlike other cities in Scotland, has uniquely managed to maintain these multi-storeys as an attractive place to live, as demonstrated by the successful combination of publicly and privately-owned flats. This makes these buildings rather special.</li> </ul>	By email

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multi-storey buildings are likely to play an important part in successfully increasing density of city living and so reducing excessive travel – an important consideration in the face of climate change and the need to reduce our carbon footprint. This is a strong feature of multi-storey accommodation in Spain and likely to be increasingly important in the UK.</li> <li>I have seen negative, or at least surprised, views expressed in the media, but I think these views are based on unfounded fears. I hope it will be possible to quell these fears and obtain enthusiastic support for listing.</li> </ul>	
Interested party (Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A just recognition of this important and very successful contribution to civic architecture by the citizens of Aberdeen in the second half of the 20th century accomplished by their City Architects Department.</li> <li>It includes the buildings and their surroundings and the contiguous designed landscape settings and the related urban design decisions. Collectively these add appropriately to the already famous efforts of Aberdonians of the late Georgian, Victorian, and Edwardian periods which with additions in the earlier 20th century made Aberdeen an exceptional example of lively handsome civic design.</li> <li>There are also instances of a disconnection between the needs of residents and the management of these multi-story buildings now to be justly honoured nationally. As a significant part of our celebrations of these designations an agreed plan needs to be addressed and established, where questions of management maintenance, and the soon to be required environmental upgrading can be set in place, and their funding identified.</li> </ul>	By email
Resident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The flats were really plush when I moved in in the 1970s. I think the buildings should be listed.</li> </ul>	Face to face
Resident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I think it is a good idea. We shouldn't just save pretty buildings like Marischal College. The high rises are an important part of Aberdeen history.</li> <li>The only worry I have is that the council might not be able to carry out the important maintenance the building requires.</li> </ul>	Face to face
Resident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am quite in favour of the proposal, if the council are still able to do certain jobs such as heating and essential maintenance.</li> </ul>	Face to face



Resident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I absolutely love my building!</li> <li>• I live there and me and my neighbours are very happy. Sorry you don't like how it looks but we really do have a sense of community.</li> </ul>	Social media
Interested party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classic brutalist architecture that needs saving from under appreciative councillors and their property developer friends.</li> </ul>	Social media
General concerns/no fixed views		
Resident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank you for the detailed email; it has more information than I was expecting which is fantastic.</li> </ul>	By email
Resident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have received zero information from the council but, depending on how they go about it, it could be a good thing. They have said we won't see any major changes but that remains to be seen.</li> </ul>	Face to face
Interested party (elected member)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think it's good there's a consultation going on. It gives the people who live in the tower blocks a chance to come down and speak to the people who are putting this proposal forward.</li> </ul>	Face to face
Interested party (community council)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of upkeep to the council is a concern – worried it will be used as an excuse to not maintain the buildings.</li> </ul>	Face to face
Interested party (community council)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am worried it [listing] would be used by the council as an excuse not to maintain [the buildings].</li> </ul>	Face to face
Resident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The blocks are unfortunately used as a 'dumping ground' for problem families, there are social problems and the lifts aren't cleaned regularly.</li> </ul>	Face to face
Resident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am not opposed to listing, I like my flat – it is large, central, and has good views. I understand why people are interested in these buildings. But heating is a big problem. We have been told the system will be upgraded, but when? Listing might stop it. We are worried about our heating bills increasing.</li> </ul>	Face to face
Objection to listing		
Resident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First, I am against it [listing] because this building does not integrate well in Aberdeen landscape. It is so tall and large that it is an eyesore of the landscape and view from different from point of view in town. From the beach, it is showing too big and an eye sore. From town, it is raising much higher than the old building and therefore it is not nice to see and does not integrate well in the architecture.</li> </ul>	By email



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondly, this building is old and protecting it will make it impossible to renovate it to a newest standard in the future by using new material. Also, it will not be possible to suppurate it, it will be impossible to change its construction material, or its shape. We should be allowed to change its material. Also, we should be able to upgrade for instance by closing the balcony with windows and make them all as "conservatory".</li> <li>• Finally, there is no need to class all these high-rise buildings. Why not list just a couple of not so high buildings? For instance, Virginia Court is not such an eye sore because of its lower height.</li> </ul>	
Interested party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These buildings should be demolished, not preserved. They are and have been depressing, demoralizing, confining places for people to live in as well as isolation for older residents which were built at a time of great hardship.</li> <li>• Should they be listed the cost of maintaining by the government is very high for buildings with many problems. Surely in this day and age more comfortable housing not to exceed 3-4 stories with green spaces would make for a much happier community.</li> </ul>	By email
Interested party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listed in the "worst buildings of the century" rankings I assume?</li> </ul>	Social media
Interested party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those blocks are hideous eyesores. I'd have them ripped down, but Aberdeen Council would only manage to replace them with something worse.</li> </ul>	Social media