

Ken Skates AC / AM
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Diwylliant, Chwaraeon a Thwristiaeth
Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref KS/00759/15

William Powell AM
Chair - petitions committee
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

6 July 2015

Dear William,

Thank you for your letter of 18 June and the attached correspondence received by your Committee from Mrs Kathryn Gibson, owner of Garth Celyn/Pen-y-Bryn. Like your committee I have been impressed by the actions of Mrs Gibson, illustrated by the stories provided by petitioners, in opening her property Pen-y-Bryn free of charge to so many visitors over the years. The visits have clearly had a lasting impact on many people.

The issue raised by Mrs Gibson and the petition is for the Welsh Government to safeguard the future of Garth Celyn. A common suggestion is that the property should be purchased by the Welsh Government and converted into a Welsh Cultural Centre.

I am well aware of the importance of the historic landscape at Abergwyngregyn and its association with the princes of Gwynedd. This is reflected in the statutory designations that have been placed on key historic features within the village and landscape. The enclosure adjacent to Pen-y-Bryn and the castle mound known as y Mwd in the village centre have both been scheduled. In addition, Pen-y-Bryn house is listed grade II* in recognition of its architectural importance. As I said in my previous letter to you, I am confident that these statutory measures can protect these precious remains from damage through unsympathetic development both now and in the future.

I can understand the petitioners' desire for Mrs Gibson's property to be purchased by the Welsh Government. They are undoubtedly concerned that a new owner may not wish to open a private house to visitors. However taking a property into State care would be an undertaking only of last resort for the Welsh Government. It could only be considered if a site of national significance was not capable of being used as a residence and was faced with a threat of some kind.

I would urge the local community and other interested parties to explore other options for the provision of public access. These could include working with or establishing a local preservation trust. This could work with the local authority or other public bodies to apply for grants from sources such as the HLF.

I am sympathetic to the views expressed by the petitioners, who have clearly enjoyed their visits to Pen-y-Bryn at the invitation of the present owner. The number of emails received highlights that many people in Wales and further afield have strong feelings about recognising the historic importance and cultural legacy of the medieval Welsh Princes.

It was in recognition of this that over the past six years the Welsh Government has supported a series of projects to conserve, interpret and provide public access to historic sites associated with the Princes of Gwynedd. In Abergwyngregyn this included funding excavations of the archaeological remains near y Mwd and a local community initiative to install an interpretative exhibition about the royal court of Garth Celyn in Ty Pwmp. Later this summer the existing interpretation will be further enhanced by the addition of a new touchscreen display providing access to comprehensive on-line bilingual information. This will be produced by Snowdonia National Park under the Welsh Government led Heritage Tourism Project. This interpretation will link to walking trails which encourage visitors to explore the landscape of the Royal Court so vividly described in the works of Saunders Lewis, Thomas Parry, Edith Pargeter and others.

In the circumstances, I am of the opinion that the immediate focus for the Welsh Government should be on working with partners. This needs to include the local community and public authorities, on continuing to raise awareness of the importance of the whole landscape in and around Abergwyngregyn and its strong royal association with the princes of Gwynedd.

Yours ever,



Ken Skates AC / AM

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