

Uncertainty hangs over future of Carbisdale

By Jack Calvert

THE future of what used to be one of Sutherland's major tourist attractions, Carbisdale Castle, remains unclear – as does what is to happen to its considerable art collection.

The current owners of the castle, the Scottish Youth Hostels Association (SYHA), put it on sale for offers over £1.2 million in June, advertising in such as Country Life magazine, but they have since remained tight-lipped about its fate.

An SYHA spokesperson said: "Any negotiations that are going on are confidential with regards to the sale. It's a private sale and there's nothing confirmed at the moment."

Once considered to be the "jewel in the crown" of the SYHA, 150-bed Carbisdale attracted more than 20,000 visitors a year and employed 18 full-time staff as a hostel.

Concerns have been raised that, once sold, the castle will not be used as it was intended when gifted to the organisation by the Salvesen family in 1945,

and whether it is morally right that the B-listed property's enviable art collection is included in the sale, with no guarantee that the public will be able to benefit from its beauty in the future.

Treasurer of Creich Community Council, Russell Taylor, said: "It's almost got overtones of a conspiracy. We've not been given any information on this at all.

"It's a little closed shop, a little clique somewhere, but there you go.

"They've been obscuring everything they possibly can.

"It's all really sad."

Mr Taylor added that the community council was looking into whether or not the castle's deed of transfer stipulated it must be used as a youth hostel if sold, and indeed any intimation of what should become of all art works, but said he would welcome the sale of the landmark to a hotel group.

He said: "It's difficult to know what one might use it for. They were talking about trying to sell it to a big hotel group which would refurbish it.

"We wouldn't be against that I'm sure, but the chances of it being sold, and

being used as something revenue earning, I think are slight."

The 40,000 sq/ft, five floor property, has two grand galleried halls, 40 bedrooms and its own loch.

Last year the SYHA confirmed the hostel would be shut for the "foreseeable future" because of mounting repair costs and weather damage. The capital needed to restore Carbisdale was previously estimated to be around £6 million.

The SYHA spokesperson said: "The principal charitable objective of SYHA is 'the advancement of education, for the public benefit, by helping all, but especially young people, to experience and appreciate the Scottish countryside, environment, natural heritage and places of historic and cultural interest in Scotland, and through the promotion of their health, recreation and education, particularly by providing low cost accommodation for them on their travels'.

"Therefore, as a not-for-profit, self-funding organisation, we have a duty to secure the long-term sustainability of our network for future generations

and make best use of scarce resources across the network.

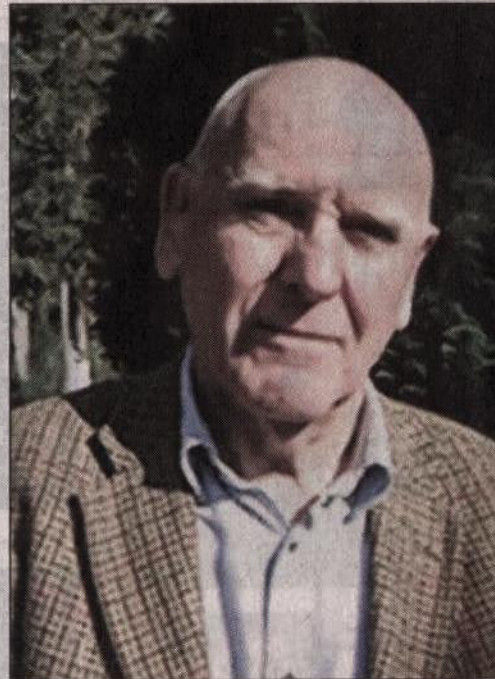
"In putting Carbisdale Castle up for sale, the SYHA board of trustees and directors are acting in the best interests of both SYHA and the local community to find a more sustainable commercial or community use to be of benefit to the local area."

It has baffled residents that the SYHA did not approach Historic Scotland about possible funding to help restore the building.

A Historic Scotland spokesperson told the NT that it had spoken to the SYHA about applying for its building repair grant scheme, but they never applied.

The spokesperson added: "They would have been eligible to apply, but whether they would have qualified for funding would have depended on their application. People have to apply to us, we don't just hand out money."

● This week, Historic Scotland announced that, in its latest round of Building Repair Grants, they have awarded £193,440 to restoring the Castle of Mey in Caithness.



Russell Taylor – looking into deeds of transfer.