



## Designation Consultation

This designation consultation is open for comment until 09/05/2024

### Give us your comments

Historic Environment Scotland consult with those who are directly affected by designation proposals – including owners, occupiers and tenants – and with the planning authority.

We also welcome comments from interested persons or groups.

When we consult about a designation case we will have carried out research and set this out in a **report of handling**. This report is an assessment produced for consultation and it sets out our view, including a proposed decision. The assessment is not intended to be a definitive account or description of the site or place. We consider the comments received before we take a final decision.

We consider comments and representations which are material to our decision-making, such as:

- Your understanding of the cultural significance of the site or place.
- Whether sites or places meet the criteria for designation.
- The purpose and implications of designating the site or place. We consider whether these are relevant to the case.
- Development proposals related to the site or place. Where there are development proposals, we consider whether to proceed with designation in line with our designation policy.
- The accuracy of our information.

You can find more guidance on providing comments and how we handle your information on our [website](#).

Information on how we treat your personal data is available on our [Privacy Notice](#).

### How to make a comment

Please send your comments to [designationconsultations@hes.scot](mailto:designationconsultations@hes.scot) and provide us with the case reference. You can also make comments through our [portal](#) by clicking on the link 'email your comments about this case'.

**If you are the owner, occupier or tenant or the planning authority please email us at: [designations@hes.scot](mailto:designations@hes.scot).**

If you are unable to email your comments please phone us on 0131 668 8914.



## Case information

<b>Case ID</b>	300051392
<b>Name of Site</b>	The Low Port Centre, 1 Blackness Road, Linlithgow
<b>Postcode (if any)</b>	EH49 7HZ

<b>Local Authority</b>	West Lothian
<b>National Grid Reference</b>	NT 00448 77197
<b>Designation Type</b>	Listed Building
<b>Designation No. and category of listing (if any)</b>	N/A
<b>Case Type</b>	Designation

<b>Received/Start Date</b>	18/05/2021
<b>Decision Date</b>	Pending

## 1. Proposed decision

<b>Previous Statutory Listing Address</b>	N/A	<b>Previous category of listing</b>	N/A
<b>New Statutory Listing Address</b>	The Low Port Centre with mural by James Cumming, 1 Blackness Road, Linlithgow	<b>New category of listing</b>	B

Our assessment using the selection guidance shows that the building meets the criteria of special architectural or historic interest. The proposed decision is to list the building at category B.

## 2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

### 2.1 Designation Background

There is no known previous review of this site for listing.

The site is located within Linlithgow Palace And High Street Conservation Area (CA378).



## 2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

## 3. Assessment

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### 3.1 Assessment information

We received a proposal to designate the Low Port Centre from West Lothian Council on 18/05/2021. (Designations applications are published on our portal and will be available to view during the lifetime of the case and until 3 months after the case is closed.)

The applicant provided the following information and views in their application:

- The mural in the stairwell is considered to be an outstanding example of the work of the late artist James Cumming.
- The design of the Low Port Centre building by late architect Anthony Wheeler may also be of interest.
- West Lothian Council have declared the building surplus to requirements, and it is to be marketed for sale.

We visited the Low Port Centre on 18/08/2021.

We saw the exterior and interior.

### 3.2 Assessment of special architectural or historic interest

We have found that the building meets the criteria for listing.

We carried out an assessment using the selection guidance to decide whether a site or place is of special architectural or historic interest. See **Annex A**.

The listing criteria and selection guidance for listed buildings are published in Designation Policy and Selection Guidance (2019), Annex 2, pp. 11-13, <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/designation-policy>.

## 4. Consultation

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### 4.1 Consultation information

Consultation period: 18/04/2024 to 09/05/2024.



We have consulted directly with the: owner(s), occupier(s) and the planning authority.

The consultation report of handling is published on our portal for comment from interested parties.

## 4.2 Designation consultations

### *Comments we consider*

We will consider comments and representations which are material to our decision-making, such as:

- Your understanding of the cultural significance of the site or place and whether it meets the criteria for designation.
- The purpose and implications of designating the site or place. We consider whether these are relevant to the case.
- Development proposals related to the site or place. Where there are development proposals, we consider whether to proceed with designation in line with our designation policy.
- The accuracy of our information.

### *Comments we don't consider*

We do not consider comments and representations on non-relevant/non-material issues, such as:

- Economic considerations
- Abusive or offensive remarks
- Whether you personally like, or do not like, a proposal

Our video about consultations explains how you can comment on our designations decisions, and what we can and can't take into account when considering your views. <https://youtu.be/ZlqU51tRA6g>.

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## Dara Parsons

Head of Designations  
Heritage Directorate  
Historic Environment Scotland

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## ANNEX A

### Assessment of special architectural or historic interest

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#### 1. Statutory address

The Low Port Centre, with mural by James Cumming, 1 Blackness Road, Linlithgow

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#### 2. Description and historical development

##### 2.1 Description

The Low Port Centre building was designed by Wheeler & Sproson around 1983 and built 1986-88. It is a large, three-storey, irregular plan community outdoor and education centre. It is located within a long plot at the northeastern end of Linlithgow High Street. The building is of painted render with a slate roof and comprises three storeys of residential accommodation at the southern end; offices, kitchen facilities and large gym hall with rock-climbing wall in the central block; and stores, drying rooms and workshops in the northern end of the building.

The building includes a significant mural, painted in 1988 by James Cumming RSA RSW (1922-1991) in the entrance foyer. The artwork, titled 'The Community: A Festival of Time' measures 6.1 by 9.1 meters and is painted in acrylic resin and covers the southwestern wall of the two-storey foyer stairwell, opposite the main entrance.

The mural, located in the foyer, depicts a theme of timeless community with a scene of 39 figures and characters symbolising various aspects of community life within a colourful town setting. At the top of the mural there is a skyline of rounded hills and rooftops including a clocktower depicting 'Measure of Time' and a spire representing 'The Church', while 'The River of Time' runs across the lower portion of the mural. Various industries and professions are represented through figures including 'Teacher', 'Engineer', 'Nursing', 'Fashion' and 'Authority' as well as stages of life such as 'Childhood', 'Youth', 'Old Age', 'The incoming' and 'The outgoing'. A Key to the figures in the scene is attached to the stairwell wall beside the mural.

##### 2.2 Historical development

The Low Port Centre was designed around 1983 by the architectural firm Wheeler & Sproson as a community outdoor and education centre with residential facilities for Lothian Regional Council.

Plans in the Wheeler and Sproson Collection dated to 1983 detail the building and its various facilities and show that it was built substantially as designed (NMRS 551 334/1/2/36/1). The building was built from 1986 and opened on 29 October 1988.



It was the idea of architect (Sir) Anthony Wheeler PPRSA (1919-2013) to decorate the principal stairwell of the building with a bespoke artwork and he commissioned the mural from the artist James Cumming. The mural was funded by the Edwin Abbey Austin Memorial Trust Fund (West Lothian Art). Cumming completed the mural over a four-month period and while working he lived in Linlithgow at the Low Port Centre during the week, integrating himself with the community. The character led theme of the mural is noted to have been developed in consultation with the community who he would speak with while completing the work (Sandy Wood, p 3.).

The building remained in use as a community outdoor education centre until around 2021 and is now in use as a community centre.

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### 3. Assessment of special architectural or historic interest

To be listed a building must be of 'special architectural or historic interest' as set out in the [Planning \(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas\) \(Scotland\) Act 1997](#). To decide if a building is of special interest for listing we assess its cultural significance using selection guidance which has two main headings – architectural interest and historic interest (see Designation Policy and Selection Guidance, 2019, Annex 2, pp. 11-13).

The selection guidance provides a framework within which judgement is exercised in reaching individual decisions. The special architectural or historic interest of a building can be demonstrated in one or more of the following ways.

#### 3.1 Architectural interest

The architectural interest of a building may include its design, designer, interior, plan form, materials, regional traditions, and setting and the extent to which these characteristics survive. These factors are grouped under two headings:

##### 3.1.1 Design

'The Community: A Festival of Time' is a significant work by the artist James Cumming RSA RSW (1922-1996), who was a master of mural painting and a leading artist and art educator in his lifetime. The collaboration of artist and architect is also significant, as the painting and the Low Port Centre building were conceived by Cumming and Anthony Wheeler together as a set piece.

The Low Port Centre building was designed by Wheeler and Sproson, an award-winning architectural practice. The practice rose to prominence in the 1950s and 1960s for their celebrated contextual approach to the redevelopment of historic urban sites including local authority housing developments in Burntisland (1955-75) and Dysart (1958-1977). Some of the practice's work has been recognised through listing and is representative both of the scope of their approach to contextual modernism as well as their overtly modernist designs. In Fife, there is Sailor's Walk



(LB36358) and Pathhead Medical Centre (LB36399), two listed examples of the practice's conservation and conversion of historic buildings. Two modernist designs of the practice are listed at St Columba's Parish Church in Glenrothes which dates from 1960 listed (LB49999) and the Hunter Building, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh College of Art, designed in 1971 (LB52563).

The Low Port Centre building was designed towards the end of the practice's body of work. The building displays their characteristic style of combining modern design with influences of Scotland's vernacular and traditional architectural forms. This is shown in the rounded stair tower at the south of the building towards the high street, and the use of slate and painted render. Wheeler and Sproson liked to use a restricted and muted colour and material palette in their buildings, favouring charcoal, dark red, browns and creams. The Low Port Centre is no exception using only cream and browns and the building is substantially unaltered from the design shown in architects' drawings of the site from 1983.

The practice placed great value on the integration of art within their designs commissioning a mural by Alberto Morrocco (1917-1998) for their earliest church design at St Columba's, Glenrothes and a mural by David McClure (1926-1998) for the University of St Andrews, Students' Union in the late 1960s. The collaboration with Cumming at the Low Port Centre reflects their continued interest in the integration of art and architecture in new building projects.

Cumming is regarded as one of the most significant Scottish painters of the later 20<sup>th</sup> century and a figure of major influence as both an artist and a lecturer at Edinburgh College of Art. Cumming was born in Dunfermline, Fife and won an Andrew Grant Scholarship to attend the Edinburgh College of Art in 1939. His studies were interrupted by the Second World War where he served in the Royal Air Force. He returned to Edinburgh College of Art in 1946 and completed his Diploma and postgraduate degree in 1949 following which he was awarded a Travelling Scholarship, which he used to live and work in the community of Callanish on the Isle of Lewis. The Hebridean paintings he created during this period in the early 1960s were exhibited in Edinburgh, London and New York and helped to establish his international reputation and association with the Edinburgh School of painters. The distinctive semi-figurative style of the Hebridean Paintings and technique of building up images through layers of thinly applied paint would be used and refined throughout his career including in the Low Port Mural.

Cumming was noted for the range of his intellect and interests with some of his abstract paintings inspired by science and microbiology. He also held great importance in the craft of drawing and painting and was regarded for this unrivalled technical ability and knowledge of the chemistry of materials (Firth, p .22)

Cumming taught at Edinburgh College of Art from 1950 until retirement in 1982, teaching both in the Humanities and the Painting school. His students included Sandy Moffat, John Bellamy and Richard Wright who won the Turner Prize in 2009.



He was elected Academician of the Royal Scottish Academy in 1970 and acted as its secretary between 1978 and 1980.

Cumming had a particular interest in murals and had been lecturer in mural painting at Edinburgh College of Art, even establishing a mural department there for short time. He had specialist knowledge of the history, materials and technology of this art form and Cumming undertook extensive technical research in choosing the pigments for the large-scale Low Port Centre mural.

The mural 'Community: A Festival of Time' was painted towards the end of Cumming's career and is considered to be 'the triumph of his mature style' (Firth, p. 30). It was his only public mural work and incorporates key themes, motifs and techniques that Cumming developed throughout his career. The mural features a complex layered composition of semi-abstract figures in harmonious colours punctuated by highlights of curvilinear shapes and white outlines. The mural is a major example of Cumming's signature layered technique, using stencils to mark out shapes and areas of colour, and of his continued interest in themes of humanity and community. The mural was awarded the Arts and Crafts in Architecture Award of the Saltire Society in 1990.

### 3.1.2 Setting

The Low Port Centre is located in a central area of the historic town of Linlithgow at the northeast end of the High Street within Linlithgow Palace and High Street Conservation Area (CA378). The building is set to the south of the scheduled monument Linlithgow Palace, Peel and Royal Park which includes Linlithgow Loch (SM13099) and immediately southwest of the listed Low Port Primary School (LB37358). With the proximity of the building to the adjacent Linlithgow Loch, the outdoor centre had particular focus on water sports with stores and drying rooms located at the northern end of the building.

Although there is no direct depiction of Linlithgow in the mural, the surrounding town setting is a clear influence. Symbolic architectural shapes suggest a historic setting and the figures represent a range of roles and personalities found in a large town or community. This link between the mural, the building's community function and its setting add to its special interest.

## 3.2 Historic interest

Historic interest is in such things as a building's age, rarity, social historical interest and associations with people or events that have had a significant impact on Scotland's cultural heritage. Historic interest is assessed under three headings:

### 3.2.1 Age and rarity





Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, painted murals in Scotland were most commonly found within buildings such as churches and high-status private houses. Examples of listed buildings which contain significant murals include the Former Catholic Apostolic Church at Mansfield Place which contains extensive murals by Phoebe Anna Traquair of 1893-1901 (LB26849). A notable example of mural in a public building is the large-scale historical murals and astrological ceiling by William Hole in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh of 1887-1901 (LB27764).

By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century art came to be valued as an important part of new public building and housing developments which were largely state sponsored at that time. The commissioning of works such as sculptures and concrete or painted murals for public buildings and spaces reflected a more socially aware approach to public art with the objective of creating a sense of place and identity and of bringing art out of galleries and into people's daily lives. In this context murals came to be commissioned more commonly in public buildings such as community centres and schools. A listed example of a later 20<sup>th</sup> century mural commissioned for a public building is the Scottish Wildlife Mural by Alasdair at Palacerigg Visitor Centre, Cumbernauld of 1974 (LB52610).

Fixed artworks such as murals which cannot easily be relocated are however vulnerable to redevelopment and easily covered or painted over when decorative schemes are changed. Many mid to later 20<sup>th</sup> century murals have been lost to demolition or redecoration making surviving examples increasingly rare.

James Cumming was a leading Scottish artist and influential lecturer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While Cumming was a leading figure in advancing the study of mural painting, he painted few known surviving murals with the majority of his output painted canvases. Low Port was Cumming's only public mural and is the only known surviving example of this medium painted by the artist. The Community: A Festival of Time is therefore significant as a rare surviving example of Cumming's mural work.

The Low Port Centre was commissioned towards the end of the heyday of outdoor educational provision and is a relatively rare and unusual example of an outdoor education centre. The majority of outdoor education centres were developed in rural locations with many utilising existing buildings such as former country houses and purpose-built examples often designed as basic residential structures. The Low Port Centre is a rare example of the building type for its bespoke design, urban location and combined residential and community centre function (See section 3.2.2).

### 3.2.2 Social historical interest

Outdoor education developed in Scotland in the 1960s, reaching its peak of provision in the 1970s and 1980s. Scotland was one of the first countries to formalise outdoor education and the extensive development of this type of education during this period was considered to be of international significance (Higgins). Influenced by a number of Education Acts, local authorities established numerous outdoor education centres



which provided a base for different outdoor activities alongside a residential experience and were typically developed in more rural areas. The commission of the building and the community themed mural are therefore of some social historical significance for what they tell us about the changing aims of public sector educational provision in later 20<sup>th</sup> century Scotland.

### 3.2.3 Association with people or events of national importance

There is no association with a person or event of national importance.

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## 4. Summary of assessment

The Low Port Centre meets the criteria of special architectural or historic interest for the following reasons:

- The interest of the collaboration between artist and architect in this bespoke commission for an outdoor education centre.
- The building includes a major example of a later 20<sup>th</sup> century public mural.
- The building's use of modern design with vernacular influences is characteristic of the work of Wheeler & Sproson
- The mural and building have a high level of authenticity having not been altered or restored.
- The immediate and wider setting of the building contributes to our understanding of the building's modern vernacular form and the mural's community theme which depicts aspects of the historic town centre.
- The mural is a rare and important public work of artist James Cumming that depicts themes and motifs commonly found in his work and techniques developed throughout his career.
- Outdoor education centres are a relatively rare building type, and the Low Port Centre is a notable, purpose-built example.

## 5. Category of listing

Once a building is found to be of special architectural or historic interest, it is then classified under one of three categories (A, B or C) according to its relative importance. While the listing itself has legal weight and gives statutory protection, the categories have no legal status and are advisory. They affect how a building is managed in the planning system.

Category definitions are found at Annex 2 of Designation Policy and Selection Guidance (2019) <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/designation-policy>.

### 5.1 Level of importance



The Low Port Centre's level of importance is category B.

Buildings listed at category B are defined as 'buildings of special architectural or historic interest which are major examples of a particular period, style or type.

The mural is regarded as major example of the artist's work and the building is relatively rare example of a purpose-built Outdoor Education Centre. Category B is considered to be the most appropriate level of listing.

## 7. Other Information

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N/A

## 8. References

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Canmore: <http://canmore.org.uk/> CANMORE ID 274643

### Archives

National Record of The Historic Environment, Wheeler and Sproson Collection, Archive relating to Community and Outdoor Education Centre, Low Port, Linlithgow, 1982 to 1987, 551 334/1/2/36/1.

### Printed Sources

Firth, J., (1995) *James Cumming: an appreciation*, Edinburgh: The Mercat Press in association with The Scottish Gallery.

Higgins, P. (2002) *Outdoor education in Scotland*. Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning. 2(2),149-168.

### Online Sources

ArtUK, Entry for James Cumming, <https://artuk.org/discover/artists/cumming-james-19221991>

Ball, Wendy E., West Lothian (Scotland). Community Arts (2012) *Out in the Open, Public Art in West Lothian*, p.26 – accessed online - <https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/media/5350/Out-in-the-Open-Public-Art-Book/pdf/outintheopen.pdf>

Dictionary of Scottish Architects, entry for 'Community outdoor and education centre' [https://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/building\\_full.php?id=411020](https://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/building_full.php?id=411020) [accessed 19.02.2024].



Dictionary of Scottish Architects, entry for 'Wheeler & Sproson'  
[https://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect\\_full.php?id=400444](https://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=400444) [accessed 19.02.2024].

Sandy Wood (2016) Black Bitch Issue 44 August, 'Community: A Festival of Time, Masterpiece Mural in Linlithgow', p. 6 [accessed 19.02.2024].

## Other Information

Information about James Cumming provided by Laura Cumming (2021).

## 9. Indicative Map

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A map of the proposed listed building is attached separately.