

Forest Service



Our reference: DAERA/23/25



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028 663 [REDACTED]

22-Feb-2023

Dear [REDACTED]

### Freedom of Information Act 2000

Regarding your request for information received by the Department on 25 January 2023 which sought the following information:

A range of questions relating to Forest Service ownership of Castlewellan Castle.

I can advise that the Department has completed its search and can confirm that it holds some of the information you requested which is below.

1. Can you confirm that Castlewellan Castle is owned by DAERA/Forest Service NI?

**Castlewellan Castle is owned by DAERA.**

2. Can you provide details of the arrangements made with Centre Ministries to allow them to use the building for their church and evangelical activities?

**Centre Ministries have a 50 Year lease with DAERA for Castlewellan Castle dated 6 June 1974. The permitted use under the terms of the lease is as a Conference Centre.**

3. Can you provide details of the lease or other form of contract and state what rent, or payments are made by Centre Ministries.

**The tenant is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the interior and exterior of the Castle including the grounds and the current annual rental as *Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.***

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**determined by the Department of Finance Land & Property Services is £1,200 pa.**

4. Can you state who is responsible for maintenance, heating, and upkeep of Castlewellan Castle and whether any public money is used to facilitate the use of the building by Centre Ministries?

**See response at 3 regarding maintenance and upkeep of the Castle. Centre Ministries also have responsibility for heating. I can confirm that Centre Ministries have not obtained any funding from DAERA.**

9. Can you state whether any open and advertised opportunity was given to allow other groups to bid for the opportunity to use Castlewellan Castle?

**Forest Service do not hold this information.**

If you require any clarification, believe that any part of your request has been overlooked, misunderstood, or misinterpreted, please contact me in the first instance to see if it is a matter that can be resolved.

If you are unhappy with the manner in which your request for information has been handled or the decision to release/withhold information, you have the right to request a formal review by the Department. If you wish to do so, please contact The Review Section either by e-mailing [daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk) or by post at The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Data Protection & Information Management Branch, Floor 2, Ballykelly House, 111 Ballykelly Road, Ballykelly, Limavady BT49 9HP, within two months from the date of this letter.

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE, SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review of the Department's decision.

Your remaining questions numbers 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8 fall outside the remit of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and I have answered these below.

5. Can you confirm whether DAERA/Forest Service NI considered any conflict of interest in the role of Malcolm Beattie in allowing Centre Ministries to get the use of Castlewellan Castle? Beattie is a director of Centre Ministries.

**Centre Ministries lease of Castlewellan Castle commenced on 6 June 1974 with a term of 50 years, this did not present any conflict as Mr Beatty was not employed by the Department at that time.**

6. Was the agreement with Centre Ministries made while Malcolm Beattie was still in post at DAERA (He retired in 2018 I understand).

**As per answer to question 5 above.**

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7. Can you state what steps were taken in terms of equalities impact assessment to review allowing a Christian Evangelical organisation to have exclusive use of Castlewellan Castle.

**Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 was not a requirement in 1974.**

8. Can you state what policies exist to allow other members of the public, who are not evangelical Christians to have access to and use of Castlewellan Castle facilities?

**The Centre Ministries Charity advertises the facilities at Castlewellan Castle for on-site conferences, Church retreats, youth weekends, school residentials and more, with flexible accommodation and catering to suit visitor's needs.**

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

[Redacted Name]

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