



Scotland's Garden & Landscape Heritage

The City of Edinburgh Council
Planning and Building Standards

21 December 2022

By email only Clare.Macdonald@edinburgh.gov.uk

Dear Clare,

**22/04766/FUL, 22/04768/LBC and 22/04769/CON 15 Dalkeith Road, Edinburgh EH16 5BH
Selective demolition, adaption, extension and upgrading of a Class 4 office building
demolition of car park and ancillary buildings and proposed development of residential
accommodation with associated landscaping, parking and infrastructure**

Sylvia Crowe – A short biography

Sylvia Crowe (b.1901 d.1997) was a leading force in the development of the changing landscapes and landscape profession in Britain. Crowe originally trained in Horticulture, obtaining a Diploma in Horticulture from Swanley Horticultural College 1920–22. Crowe authored seminal reading for landscape architects, including *Tomorrow's Landscape* (1956), *The Landscape of Power* (1958), and *The Landscape of Roads* (1960), key in providing practical guidelines for designers involved in various aspects of landscape architecture and countryside planning. She was the first landscape architect to be involved in the work of the Forestry Commission. On returning from active military services, Sylvia Crowe became Honorary Secretary of the newly formed International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA). Crowe held the position for two years, during which time the constitution of Federation was written and accepted. 2023 represents the 75th anniversary of the establishment of IFLA. In 1953 she was elected Vice-President and was Secretary General between 1956–59. In addition to her roles at IFLA she was the second female president of the Institute of Landscape Architects and Chairman of Tree Council.

She ran a successful design practice, was a lead theorist in designing nuclear power stations completing iconic designs such as Trawsfynydd in North Wales, the first power station to be built in a National Park, or Wylfa on the island of Anglesey, Crowe also designed numerous reservoirs, including Rutland Water in Leicestershire in 1968. At the time of its completion time, it was the largest manmade reservoir in Europe. As with Colvin at Trimpey, Crowe also aimed to create a simple landscape that could merge into the surrounding countryside. As

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Wendy Powell, long term collaborator of Crowe remembered, 'On one occasion, Crowe asked friends who had visited Rutland Water what they thought of the landscape treatment there; they are understood to have replied: "what landscape treatment, we thought it was all natural!" Crowe was delighted as she believed this was the greatest compliment that could be paid to a landscape architect'.

Silvia Crowe's work at the Scottish Widows office building by architects Spence, Glover and Ferguson between 1972–76 represents the largest example of her work in Scotland, the others being the Forestry Commission headquarters, Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh in 1974, and an earlier Spence building, namely Glasgow (Abbotsinch) Airport by Basil Spence & Partners in 1967. However, no evidence of this latter work survives.

Scottish Widows Fund and Life Assurance Head Office

Silvia Crowe's work at the Scottish Widows Fund and Life Assurance Head Office represents a fine example of the close collaboration between architect and landscape architect, producing a distinctive building and associated landscape which is particularly suited to its landscape and townscape setting. It is understood that Crowe was assisted by Sally Race.

Occupying a sloping site orientated towards Holyrood Park and Arthur's Seat and inspired by the geological structure of the basalt of Salisbury Crags, the building comprises a series of brown glazed interlocking hexagonal blocks of one to four storeys, arranged slightly haphazardly around two service cores to create a spatially varied open plan office space. Staff parking for 300 cars is located over two levels at the lower, north-east end of the site, maximising the fall of the site, and is well disguised beneath an extensive roof garden of heathers and ground covers which are overlooked by the northern sections of the building and visually connect building with the adjacent park. The entrance from Dalkeith Road is particularly exciting, spanning a reflecting pool to enter into an airy foyer with views of the nearby hills, streetscape and landscape surroundings. The hexagonal theme extends into the boundary walls which define the public-private division of the site, becoming more abstracted to create a particularly well-articulated interface with the surrounding streets. Crowe's influence extended inside the building, with internal planting being used to great effect to link the office spaces with the surrounding gardens and the park beyond, and the staff restaurant opens onto outdoor terraces with fine views towards Arthur's Seat. Considerable attention was paid to the aerial view of the building when seen from Salisbury Crags.

This is a confident expression of considered, integrated architectural and landscape design, allied with pragmatic and sensitive site planning, achieved by two highly respected practitioners late in their professional lives, who were able to bring the full extent of their working experience and skill to bear on this project. The result is a fitting tribute to their creative talents, a harmonious blending of architecture and landscape which represents an exemplar of 20th Century office development.



<https://canmore.org.uk/collection/977406>

Image by courtesy of Canmore

SGLH Review of planning documents and supporting urban design review panel

Scotland's Garden and Landscape Heritage (SGLH) and Sco.Mo a landscape modernist recording project welcome the recommendations as set out in the Edinburgh Urban Design Panel title '15 Dalkeith Road' report of MS Teams Meeting dated 29th June '22 which included representation from a LIS member. Specifically, we support recommendations for an *'holistic evidence-based approach for the entire site'* and support recommendations for the preparation of *'a Conservation Plan'* in support of the application and importantly to record the extent of the Silvia Crowe landscape design and explore how the design can be retained, incorporated into the proposals and inform the emerging proposals.

The following planning submittal documents have been reviewed.

- GA_Soft Landscape Area_01 5587362
- GA_Soft Landscape Area_02 5587361
- GA_Steps Area_01 5587360
- GA_Steps Area_02 5587358
- GA_Surface Area_01 5587357
- GA_Surface Area_02 5587356
- Details_Soft Landscape Area_01 5587362
- Tree Removal Retention & Protection 5587351
- Full Tree Report 5577808
- Heritage Statement, 15 Dalkeith Road, Sept '22

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Recommendations

If the Council consider that the only way to retain this exceptional example of a Late-Modernist building designed by Sir Basil Spence, Glover and Ferguson with Ove Arup and Partners (LB 50213, listed Category A) is its partial demolition and change of use to residential, that the Silva Crowe designed landscape associated with the retained building should be retained and conserved, whilst the remaining landscape, notably the roof garden to the subterranean car park is fully documented.

In considering the proposed development, we have concerns that the proposals do not retain the Silvia Crowe landscape to the roof of the underground car park.

We would recommend that the planting is documented, together with the hardstanding to record the Crowe landscaping for posterity. Further, the recording of the soft and hard landscaping, notably the Yorkstone paving edged with reclaimed granite setts, together with the decorative rocks and boulders could serve to inform the landscape proposals.

We welcome that the proposals retain the reflective pools and the distinct battered Yorkstone boundary walls including indents and associated railing panels. We would encourage a heritage led approach to their conservation and refurbishment. We ask that the proposal to incorporate aquatic planting within the pools is based upon historic evidence.

We have the following specific observations relating to the above listed layouts and reports. Observation 1 – The General Arrangement layouts indicate the removal of part of the lawn to the south of modules 1, 3 and 6. This lawn provides a setting to the modules and the horizontal form of the lawn is a continuation of the flat plain of the water pools. Therefore, it would be advantageous if the entire lawn area was retained in its entirety as a composition which includes the reflective pools and a setting to the built form.

Observation 2 – The Tree Removal Retention & Protection 5587351 identifies an area of Mixed Planting Ref. G2 for retention. However, the Tree Report records this being of poor quality and comprising mostly overgrown laurel with a few small, scattered trees. Further, the GA_Soft Landscape Area_02 identifies Meadow grass seeding within this Mixed Planting. It would not be feasible to cultivate the ground beneath retained shrubs and therefore it may be worth considering new tree planting or the establishment of a scrub woodland along the boundary to act as a screening device.

Yours sincerely,

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Acting Vice-Chair
Scotland's Garden and Landscape Heritage
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