

# Howard Park Old Men's Cabin Consultation

## Response from Kilmarnock Station Railway Heritage Trust



Thank you for your representation to the consultation on our proposal for the former Old Mens Cabin in the Howard Park. Unfortunately, while accurate information was circulated through the required channels, we are aware that numerous anonymous documents which contained a large amount of misinformation were circulated door to door by parties pertaining to be organisations which we believe do not exist. This document (in tandem with our [video](#)) will re-assert the validity and benefit to the locality of our **actual** proposal, ensure that the misinformation is addressed and address the valid questions which were inputted into the consultation.

### **Kilmarnock Station Railway Heritage Trust**

As previously indicated Kilmarnock Station Railway Trust, referred to from this point as the Trust, has a National Award winning reputation delivering regeneration to some underutilised and underappreciated buildings. Our work on the Railway station has transformed the aesthetics of the facility, refurbishing disused rooms and areas into a coffee house, meeting space, shops & training facilities. This has increased the quality of experience of those using the Railway Station as well as offering employment opportunities to the area. This is the experience we want to bring to the dilapidated building in the Howard Park helping more people enjoy the park with better facilities within.

### **What Services Do We Offer**

At present, as well as running the Railway Station, we also have a strong focus on mental wellbeing. Working with individuals with low to moderate Mental Health issues including anxiety, social isolation and depression. We provide counselling services to help individuals live a healthier, happier life. It is important to understand that mental health issues are not uncommon with 1 in 4 people affected by mental health problems in any year ([Scottish Health survey, 2019](#)) so these services are for a wide cross section of society.

### **What Do We Want To Provide at the Howard Park?**

The Trusts main goal is to provide a café within the park. The café will be open to the public with all profits invested back into our mental wellbeing services, other charitable activities or donated to a local cancer support charity. The café will also offer toilets as a public amenity within the park. The area to the side of the facility will be used to provide yoga and other wellbeing activities. To the rear of the facility will be two rooms to be used for our current Counselling service. This will see a professional councillor host between three and four clients per day within the facility during the week. This is the totality of the plan for this facility.



Furthermore, as you can see from the artist impressions of the café, this space would be a welcoming stop for those using the park. The project would take a derelict, decaying building bringing it back into public use as an amenity, improving the aesthetics of the park and improving the services of the surrounding area.

## **Misinformation**

The misinformation circulated from fictional groups indicated that the facility would be used to rehabilitate ex-offenders and those with addiction issues. These claims are categorically untrue and clearly meant to cause concern for local residents and users of the park.

While it is true that previously the Trust have run extremely successful projects to improve the lives of those with addition issues and that we are proud of the impact that we have made into the lives of those needing extra support, these were funded programmes which ran discreetly within the larger Railway Station. Even if these programmes were to be re-established, the Howard Park facility **would not** be a suitable venue for these, offering neither the space nor the privacy that our clients would need. It is sad reflection on the author(s) of these unnamed sources that they have chosen to use the strong charitable work which the Trust have completed, to spread fear and anxiety for their own purposes.

## **Antisocial Behaviour**

A few representations considered that there was an increased possibility of antisocial behaviour. Some representations indicated that needles had recently been found within the park and that the project would potentially increase these incidents. While these obviously directly reference a client group which we will **not** be engaged (again a consequence of the misinformation) it is appropriate to consider the impact of the facility on ASB within the park. Multiple sources indicate that derelict buildings are a cause of ASB and therefore the facility in its current state is a magnet for ASB given that, primarily, young adults can use the cover and lack of light/security to shield their activities from the public view making it easier for groups of young adults to congregate unsupervised within the park. This can be a particular issue if the young adults are engaging in risk taking behaviour or experimenting with alcohol or substances. However even large gatherings of young adults socialising in the evening can cause fear and anxiety for residents making the park feel a less safe place for people to use. The successful completion of the project will bring the building back into community use, increase the security and the lighting of the area and dissuade young people from congregating in the park if engaging in practices which constitute ASB.

## **Parking**

There were a few concerns regarding the level of increased parking which residents would experience. Primarily it is not believed that the cafe will actively bring people to the park rather offer services for those who utilise the park. There are already a significant number of coffee shops within the Town Centre, in-line with the town centre vision to promote a café culture, and the addition of another facility within the park would not fill a demand for new services merely provide more choice for residents/park users.

Furthermore the Howard Park has a significant amount of free and paid parking, as well as excellent alternative transport links, servicing the immediate vicinity and coping well with the use of the park particularly during busier times in summer and at weekends. It is not envisaged that the addition of the coffee shop or public toilets would make any significant change to the park at its most busy period.

While these are our considerations it should be noted that planning permission would need to be sought and these concerns could once again be considered as we progress through planning.

## Summary

To summarise we would like to assure all those who have taken the time to object that the misinformation circulated by parties who have chosen to remain nameless has been created to cause fear and concern with residents and that these allegations have never and will never be part of any plans for this beautiful site.

**There is NO proposal to have any facilities for the rehabilitation of ex-offenders**

**There is NO proposal to have any facilities for the rehabilitation of those with addiction issues.**

**There IS a proposal to have a friendly welcoming café housed within the Howard Park.**

**There IS a proposal to have a public toilet available within the facility.**

**There IS a proposal to have two consultation rooms for qualified councillors to perform 1-2-1 counselling sessions for those suffering with low to moderate level Mental Health symptoms such as stress, anxiety, loneliness and depression.**

**There IS a proposal to offer population mental health activities such as Yoga, Qigong and mindfulness in the park.**

From the outset this project was conceived to add additionally to one of Kilmarnock's most beautiful sites adding amenities and services to help people enjoy the natural surroundings and experience the health benefits that being in a green space brings. This continues to be our priority and we hope that the information contained within the document allows you to see that this project will bring these benefits to the park.

## Next Steps

The Trust along with East Ayrshire Council will hold a community meeting to consider any final, valid objections to the proposal prior to submitting the consultation as part of the Community Asset Transfer application. You will receive a direct invite to this event so if you have any concerns you will be able to discuss in a public forum. The full consultation will then be submitted for consideration by East Ayrshire Council.

We would be keen to hear from you to consider what, if any, this response has had on your views for the project. We would appreciate if you could take time to complete this one question survey which can be accessed [here](#) to let us know.