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Milngavie Heritage Centre

Milngavie should extend opening of its Heritage Centre

East and West communities

Although served by a single local authority, the communities of East and West East Dunbartonshire have their own distinctive histories, industrial, social and natural heritages. East Dunbartonshire Council (EDC), together with its Leisure and Culture Trust (EDLCT) are performing splendidly in presenting eastern heritage to local people, visitors and tourists, through major council assets, notably the Auld Kirk Museum and the refurbished Town Hall. By comparison, the west is conspicuously less well served.

Milngavie Heritage Centre

The deficit in public provision for Heritage in Milngavie was perceived by Milngavie Community Council in 2009 and a sub-committee established to address it. This committee since evolved into an independent voluntary group: the Milngavie Heritage Centre (MHC). EDC supports this venture by allowing the group to keep historic artefacts on permanent display in the elegant former Court Room at Milngavie Town Hall, attractive explanatory banners in its entry corridor, and the use of a small ante-room as an office and store. Similarly, the EDLC Trust supports by loaning materials from its archives, and with professional advice from its Museums Development and Information & Archives Officers, an excellent example of partnership working.

Two weeks per year of public access is just a start

The Heritage Centre has established a considerable reputation for its series of twice-yearly themed exhibitions, each enjoyed by several hundred visitors, including classes from local primary schools. The first day of each autumn exhibition is co-ordinated by EDLC with Scottish Civic Trust's Doors Open Day. However, the Centre's collections and displays are open to the public only during the two exhibition weeks. (An experiment with extra opening was tried during the summer of 2014, but was beset with difficulties).

This extremely limited public access to MHC's collection and resources for displays severely detracts from its role as an asset for tourists and visitors, and from its potential to contribute footfall to the town centre. The continuous daily opening these call for are beyond the scope of the voluntary group: not least because EDC, in contrast with the generous public presentation of heritage in the east, requires the group to pay hourly rent for use of premises.

The proposed Community Hub offers a major opportunity

MHC wrote the following in November 2013 in its response to the Main Issues Report: and quoted it in a submission to the Town Centres Strategies consultation in November 2016.

http://www.milngavieheritage.org/MHC_MIR.pdf

http://www.milngavieheritage.org/TCS_response.pdf

“In any future re-modelling of council properties providing public facilities, serious consideration should be given to providing permanent space for a Heritage exhibition.”

To this should be added space for essential activities such as storage, conservation and cataloguing. (We note that virtually all the many donors to the Centre’s collections have specified that their gifts must be made readily available in Milngavie.) In effect this would be a mini-museum for Milngavie and the surrounding area, reflecting the Heritage provision at Kirkintilloch Town Hall.

“Such a facility, a significant visitor attraction, could share premises with library, art gallery or community hub. It would augment the footfall both of any partner and of the wider town centre and present an outstanding example of collaboration between public and voluntary sectors”.

The Centre/Museum would serve the neighbouring communities

MHC’s strategy is to “research, examine, exhibit and interpret the history of Milngavie *and its surrounding areas*”

The inclusion in a standing display of materials from surrounding communities such as Bearsden and Baldernock would greatly enrich a visitor’s experience. For example, reference could be made to the Roman Baths and Antonine Wall and a replica of the pre-historic Bearsden shark displayed. The City of Glasgow’s internationally significant A-listed Heritage in the complex of the Reservoirs and Loch Katrine aqueduct should feature, especially in view of the loss of the on-site interpretation resource.

Respective roles of Council, Trust and MHC voluntary group

The input needed from the Local Authority to bring about this important asset, in the context of a hub “under one roof” project, would be to make owned space available which could share janitorial service with other facilities on whatever site is chosen. Provided that all objects are kept in securely locked cases, such a room could then be kept open to the public through most working days. It could still earn letting income from compatible day-time and evening bookings by other groups. The Heritage Centre Group would function much as now, with its occasional exhibitions supported informally by Trust officers. The Lillie’s access to professional staff could perhaps be extended to the Heritage Centre collections, allowing the latter to be covered by EDLC’s cataloguing system that embraces both archives and museum objects.