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Conwy Culture Centre – What’s the latest news?

In December 2015 Conwy County Borough Council got the exciting news that the Heritage Lottery Fund was going to fund the development phase of our project to create a Culture Centre for Conwy. This project aims to build an area library for Conwy, Deganwy and Llandudno Junction, a home for our archive and museum collections, a café and space for community, art and youth activities on the old Bodlondeb school site on Town Ditch Road in Conwy town. Now this development phase is coming to an end and detailed plans will be submitted to Conwy’s Planning Authority. An application for a further grant to create the centre will also be submitted shortly to the Heritage Lottery Fund in order to complete the funding package.

Who did we ask for opinions and suggestions?

We wanted as many Conwy residents as possible to give their views. We were delighted that 600 of you took part in our consultation. We spoke to current users, residents with special access concerns, schools, youth groups and individuals. We held meetings, focus groups and art workshops with our project artist, as well as circulating paper and online questionnaires. We also asked 168 tourists whether they would be interested in visiting the centre.

Thank you to everyone who contributed!

What did you tell us?

600 people had plenty to say, but here are some of the main issues:

About the new building – you are concerned that the design is appropriate for its setting by the town walls and close to Conwy Castle; you would like the heritage of the current building on the Bodlondeb site to be respected; you don’t want the Centre “to look like a supermarket”; you need safe pedestrian access and convenient car parking. Residents with disabilities had specific issues on how they could access the centre. 94% of tourists questioned said they would be interested in visiting the new centre.

About the services and activities that could be provided in the new centre - whether younger or older, you would like to see opportunities for family history research, archaeology, photography and contributing to exhibitions. Young people we asked were interested in

being able to take part in art projects. Adults would like to learn about, handle and work with historic collections and would like to see family friendly events and activities.

You told us about themes from Conwy's historic collections that you are interested in.

How are we responding?

About the new building – we had the current site assessed by a heritage expert. He advises that the current school building is one of a number by the same architect and is not a good example of the style or his work. As it would be difficult to create a culture centre by building an extension onto the old building we are planning to demolish it. We will preserve its memory by reusing stone from the building and more importantly by gathering memories of past pupils, parents and staff to create an exhibition in the new centre.

We asked our architect to revise his plans. The new plans are for a simple, low-lying building that is further set back from the road, blending into the parkland, with more trees and landscaping. Natural materials and glass will be used wherever possible.

We have a plan for parking; the current Conwy Library has no customer parking, but the new centre will have disabled parking spaces and is a short walk from two public car parks, one of which is free of charge during the week. There are a bus stop and the train station within convenient distance. We will build a new pedestrian crossing to increase safety. We have taken on board comments from a variety of special needs groups and will incorporate features such as inclined walkways and a sensory garden to enable everyone to access the centre and enjoy activities there.

We have an interpretation plan for the centre. The Centre will be a gateway to the County's heritage, using the stories from the history of Conwy County and its people, that you told us mattered to you. This will be used to create displays using our historic collections.

About the services and activities - we have drawn up an "Activity plan" that will start while the centre is being built, reflecting your expressed interests. This will include taster sessions on a wide variety of arts and heritage activities; an exhibition programme; volunteer opportunities, including some especially designed for youth volunteers; an arts hub and a schools heritage service. We will also take the centre out on the road, bringing exhibitions, activities and family history advice to venues throughout Conwy County.

Would you like to know more?

We would like to share the designs for the building with you. Why not drop-in at Conwy Library on Tuesday October 18th anytime from 10am – 8pm and talk to us about the proposals?

The designs and draft planning application will then be available to view at Conwy Library from 1st November until 29th November and at www.conwy.gov.uk/culturecentre or www.facebook.com/diwylliantconwyculture

The planning application will be submitted to Conwy Planning Authority before the end of the year.