

16 December 2019

To: Mandy Brown, Falkirk Council



Dear Mandy,

KINNEIL WALLED GARDEN

Thank you for the work which has been going on to consider the future development of the walled garden at Kinneil, and for the recent online consultation about it.

Our Management Committee have considered the options set out, and several members sent individual responses. We look forward to seeing an analysis of all the results, but also wanted to submit these separate comments as a collective response from the Friends of Kinneil.

General comments & background

An overarching point is that the walled garden was an integral part of Kinneil Estate, and its purpose and life had an organic connection to Kinneil House and to the people who lived and worked there. We believe that the most opportune and appropriate future for the walled garden, giving it the most ongoing vitality, will lie in re-integrating it within a wider overall vision for the house, surrounding buildings and estate.

To us, it does not make sense to have a separate 'Masterplan' for the walled garden. Instead, its development should be set within the overall Kinneil Masterplan, so that what is done there is an integral part of, and complementary to, the larger plan. Our understanding, from recent discussions about a new estate-wide feasibility study next year, is that Historic Environment Scotland may also share this view.

The general Kinneil Masterplan should, among other things, decide the right future for Kinneil House and Museum. However, the options for those buildings should be inextricably connected to the right solutions for the walled garden. For example, assuming there were to be a visitor/reception centre with enhanced site interpretation and/or museum, then if it would make sense to offer this in a new building in the walled garden, it would affect future options for Kinneil Museum and House. Conversely, if the current Museum moved into Kinneil House, and were itself going to be sold, or considered as a café, that too would influence the right solutions for the walled garden. As Falkirk Council owns all the assets, on behalf of the area's people, and will presumably find and invest at least some of the project's capital funds, it should also have ownership and leadership on an integrated, strategic site-wide plan.

That larger plan sees Kinneil as having significant under-developed potential as a visitor attraction (likely to be, most feasibly, a paid attraction) – to bring an economic and commercial boost not only to the estate, but also to the Bo'ness area. Appropriately developed, the estate would add to reasons for visitors to make Bo'ness a full-day (or more)

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visit, rather than half-day. Partnership and linkage with the Bo'ness & Kinneil railway, and their tens of thousands of existing annual visitors, may help to achieve this.

A 200-acre estate, with such an outstanding combination of world-class heritage features, has been acknowledged for some time as being a strategic public asset with substantial unexploited potential. It should be generating income, supporting jobs and creating heritage-related tourism spend for the area as a whole, as at other comparable sites. Yet with the closure of the plant nursery, this large estate is now supporting even fewer jobs than was already the case. The fact that the walled garden is now under review, which it was not during the 2014 feasibility study underpinning the current Kinneil Masterplan 2015-25, creates an opportunity for an imaginative use which will add to the overall viability of, and sustainable employment within, the whole estate – all owned by the Council.

A recent visiting heritage professional with experience at a senior level, in another region, of developing and running similar visitor attractions observed that Kinneil is “an amazing place with so much potential”. He added that having an historic walled garden so close to the main house is usually considered a significant added benefit and development opportunity at estates geared towards visitors, and is also viewed favourably by major funders.

We therefore support a use for the walled garden which would create the greatest additional attractiveness and potential for new visitors coming from outside the Bo'ness area – on top of the other features at Kinneil already of interest to visitors. This would generate the optimum overall development feasibility. Kinneil is, however, also a community asset, and we believe that some of these potential uses which might be found could also have community benefit and use. It is recognised that strong community involvement and support are also important factors for some major potential funders.

Historical context

The large walled garden dates from the 16th/17th Centuries and was an integral part of the estate. In those days when Kinneil House would have been at its most magnificent, the gardens were renowned for the finest fruit and vegetables, and under the Hamilton family, they would have been (as at Hamilton Palace) a centre of some of the most refined horticultural practice and training in Scotland of that period. Further archival material about this is available if of interest.

The line of the Antonine Wall runs beneath the nursery site. The walls at the north-west corner of the garden may also, according to new archaeological work last year by Geoff Bailey and others, be the remains of the Hamiltons' long-lost former 15th-Century castle of Craiglyon – a predecessor of Kinneil House. At the request of the Friends of Kinneil, the listing designation of the walled garden is understood to be presently under review by Historic Environment Scotland.

There is more information about Kinneil's (and Hamilton's) role in the history of Scottish horticulture in Marilyn Brown's authoritative book *Scotland's Lost Gardens* [Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical Monuments of Scotland, 2012], and in Geoff Bailey's booklet *Kinneil Park* [Falkirk Local History Society].

When the Council developed the nursery in the 20th Century, the fertile topsoil was removed and replaced by hardcore. More recently, Sustainable Thinking Scotland (STS) C.I.C. have also set up in the south-west corner of the walled garden. Reviving some of the old traditions, they have gained a reputation for valuable new community growing activities.

Consultation options

The options in the consultation generally offer a positive vision for the site's future. It may be that the site should encompass more than one option, especially as the walled garden is large

enough to support mixed use. In particular, we agree that STS should continue, for as long as they are able and willing to do so, their work in part of the site. This could conceivably be associated with developing one or more of the community growing options set out in the consultation. However, STS currently do also need to establish and consolidate their existing operation, including their proposed workshop building.

It might be possible for some aspects of the community growing activities also to be made to be of interest to visitors from outside the area. For example, some of the ideas around a 'secret garden', and/or educational activities on gardening and fruit/vegetable growing, might lend themselves to this in a relatively small-scale way.

Although these proposals might form part of the plan and would contribute to community benefit and involvement, it is doubted that they would create the maximum draw of external visitors, or support income generation and the greatest number of jobs.

We would question some of the other ideas for similar reasons. For example, community plots or allotments, or 'men's sheds', could have a degree of community appeal and benefit, but do not seem to make the most of Kinneil's overall high heritage value or visitor potential, nor to lead to supporting many jobs. Furthermore, whilst there may be local demand for such spaces, they could be developed at other vacant local land or parks – or even in another corner of Kinneil Estate – rather than needing to take space in this prime heritage location adjacent to the exceptional main monuments.

The Friends of Kinneil would therefore prefer one of the more ambitious options for the majority of the walled garden ground, developed within a future framework plan for Kinneil House and Estate as a whole. These options could be explored further within the forthcoming estate-wide feasibility study which is about to be commissioned.

Of the options mentioned in the consultation, we support the following ideas as fulfilling the criteria we have suggested, and as worth considering further:

1) Visitor and possible 'conference' centre

Kinneil has numerous first-class heritage features and 'stories' which deserve better and more modern interpretation. A visitor centre is a needed and attractive option, particularly if Historic Environment Scotland were to decide at this stage against further (probably more sensitive and costly) development of new interpretation spaces within Kinneil House itself.

Kinneil (which literally means 'Wall's End' in the area's ancient language) could be seen as the Eastern 'gateway' to the Antonine Wall World Heritage Site. It could make an ideal site for a previously-suggested Antonine Wall visitor centre, either in the walled garden or somewhere else in the 200 acres making up the estate. Perhaps a section of wall could also be re-constructed somewhere, for visitors to gain a better idea of what the frontier was really like. An Antonine Wall visitor centre could attract school groups from far afield, as well as being of interest to other visitors and tourists.

James Watt's Cottage and Kinneil House are thought to be the only surviving buildings in Scotland directly associated with the life and work of one of the most famous Scots in history – James Watt. The James Watt Bicentenary in 2019 has amply demonstrated and revived interest in the story of his contribution to the Industrial Revolution, and of the role in that story of the Kinneil development years (associated with the engine patent). Those years involved Watt's business partner Dr John Roebuck, who is also pivotally linked to recently-renewed interest in the history of the Carron Company and ironfounding industry. 2019 has successfully raised Kinneil's profile to new audiences (for example the population of the West Midlands) with a potential interest in visiting. The Watt/Roebuck story could be connected to the Falkirk area's modern 'brand' as a hub for innovation, industry and technical education; and to the development of steam navigation and locomotion (as in the railway running

through the estate). There is a lamentable lack of interpretation at Kinneil, and of a modern showpiece for visitors (again including school groups) about one of the most important developments ever in the history of world technology. Constraints make it unlikely that such a feature could be added next to the Watt Cottage itself (as was previously suggested by Simpson & Brown in 2014), but the walled garden is relatively close, and could offer the opportunity to do this in a modern visitor centre building. This could be combined with re-configuring access to the walled garden from the west and south sides.

The stories of Kinneil village, Kinneil House, of the Hamiltons and other residents, and of Kinneil Estate generally and its place in the local area (e.g. the Hill Climb, mining, the Fair and so on) are also not adequately presented to visitors. More and better interpretation could be offered about the Hamiltons' leading role in Scotland's history, about the painted rooms and former art collections inside the house. In 2014 it was proposed to do this in a revamped Kinneil House: if this were not taken forward, a visitor centre elsewhere on site could offer it.

During the 2014 feasibility study for Kinneil House, there was also debate about scope to include rooms for community functions, weddings, catering, concerts, exhibitions and other uses inside the house. They were mostly ruled out on practical grounds and heritage restrictions. Perhaps a modern building in the walled garden, with impressive views towards the house and beyond, could again re-open discussion of such possibilities, leading towards regeneration, and pride, at Kinneil as an iconic local community asset. Such added uses might also benefit the calculations of overall feasibility, and broaden potential funding streams.

The consultation interestingly mentions the phrase 'conference centre'. This is a further similar example of potential use. If feasible, we would strongly agree that ideas along these lines should be considered. Kinneil could make a very attractive location for certain conference-type events, seminars, study days etc.

Perhaps other related new ideas might be explored – for example tourist accommodation, or a youth hostel? An inspiring example which springs to mind of a brand new building which successfully combines various such uses and visitor facilities/experiences is [The Sill](#), at Hadrian's Wall.

The Friends attended the recent Inner Forth tourism conference which highlighted the scope for sustainable, alternative and authentic new visitor experiences in the Forth Valley. People will pay, and return, for the right offer. Kinneil came to mind several times during the day and is an ideal location to offer such experiences (heritage, arts/crafts, craft village, music, gardening, outdoor, wildlife, cycling/e-bike?) as part of the solution for the estate. Some of these ideas could be explored as contributions to visitor centre viability.

The consultation also mentions a café and toilets. These have long been requested at Kinneil and seen as currently lacking. (It has recently been good to see Falkirk Junior Bike Club using Kinneil for Saturday morning practice – the sort of new users which Kinneil needs to contribute to overall viability – but there are said to be complaints and disappointment about the lack of facilities available to them and parents). Provision within the walled garden could be a solution, and preferable to converting a small residential property, 6 Duchess Anne Cottages, which we think should be retained (and upgraded) for housing. Again, however, decisions are needed on the previous proposal that the Museum should be moved into Kinneil House, with the stable block possibly re-purposed for café and toilets. An overview needs to be taken on all the buildings, and on which if any might be released to help generate funds.

2) Skills training venue

This is another interesting idea mentioned in the consultation. It too could meet the criteria of supporting jobs and adding something different, bringing new external visitors to Kinneil, although it possibly departs slightly from the overall vision of Kinneil, which we support, as a tourist visitor attraction. As above, it too could be combined with certain community uses.

If the other existing buildings – Kinneil House and Museum – could be successfully converted to provide sufficient visitor facilities (along the lines of the previous 2014 feasibility study), then it could make sense to do something different in the walled garden, but which will also separately help to raise Kinneil's profile and bring other new people to the estate – such as this training venue idea.

If, however, the walled garden were seen (as above) as the solution for new visitor centre and facilities, the training venue idea would either fall away, or be a secondary use associated with the 'conference centre' add-on previously mentioned.

Site constraints and other factors

Clearly, any such ideas would be subject to the possibly severe site development constraints which are alluded to in the consultation paper.

Is any new development actually permissible on top of the Antonine Wall World Heritage Site, as long as it replaces existing structures? Could some of the archaeological features perhaps be excavated and incorporated as a feature within an exciting new building (c.f. Fishbourne Roman Palace, Périgueux Roman Museum)? Is it going to be possible to provide adequate site services (water and sewerage etc) at this location? More investigation and detailed information are needed on these aspects. It would be a pity if they militated against some of the more attractive options.

Finally, the consultation also mentions re-configuring access to the walled garden. We would support closing off the east access gate, and think this could help to minimise any concerns and disturbance to residents from any of the options explored above. Indeed, they may be pleased for the walled garden to find a viable and well-maintained long-term use with improved site security.

All successful options at Kinneil will require improved parking facilities, which we consider should be done by expanding the existing woodland car park. Visitors could be led towards the house down the path (John Muir Way) between the walled garden and Watt Cottage. Pedestrian access to the walled garden should be from the west side and from the north-west corner adjacent to Kinneil House. Vehicle access and deliveries could be from a new south gate referred to in the consultation.

The previous discussion notes from Falkirk Council repeatedly stated that "Falkirk Council is supportive of the Friends of Kinneil exploring all avenues of funding to pursue the joint aspirations of the Estate Masterplan". It should not be the role of our volunteers to do this in already unsustainably-overstretched spare time. Funding options should be explored and led by the main bodies responsible for such a large and significant site, if necessary employing professional fundraisers/consultants. The feasibility study should examine whether it might be necessary for a further new body to be constituted as a vehicle for funding.

We hope that these comments will be seen as helpful for your ongoing consultation and thinking; and would be happy to discuss anything further in this response, and to continue to be involved in next steps.

With kind regards and best wishes for Christmas and the New Year,

Yours sincerely



(Ian Shearer – Chair, The Friends of Kinneil – e: info@kinneil.org.uk, )