



Stonehaven & District Community Council

Janine Howie

Interim Partnership Manager
Strategy & Business Services
Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care
Partnership
Gordon House
Blackhall Road
Inverurie
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4th August 2021

Dear Ms Howie,

Invercarron Resource Centre: proposed change to vaccination facility

I write on behalf of Stonehaven and District Community Council to express our collective concern at the proposal to convert the use of this facility, hitherto dedicated to the needs of the elderly in our community (and built for that purpose), into a permanent vaccination centre. We would thank those officers of the Council who recently attended our extraordinary general meeting to inform us about the proposal however we remain, if anything more concerned and feel that the proposal has not been adequately thought through and is likely in the end to prove a wholly inadequate response to the need for a vaccination centre.

First of all, we want to underline our full support for the creation of a vaccination centre in Stonehaven to serve the town and its wider community. Our concerns about the choice of the Invercarron Resource Centre as the site for this are various and are detailed below.

- Firstly, there was no consultation with SDCC, user groups or the wider community regarding the decision to make the Invercarron Resource Centre a permanent vaccination centre. Whether or not it was an operational matter, surely a decision with such far reaching consequences for the elderly in our community deserved greater public consultation. When information did come into the public domain, it seemed to be almost at the point of being too far down the line for it to be possible for SDCC or others to influence any meaningful change.
- There are very major concerns about parking, with the current five parking spaces outside the Invercarron Resource Centre, likely to drop down to three once converted to fully accessible and appropriately cross hatched disabled parking spaces. The car park is also used regularly by residents inter alia. Traffic is precluded from meaningful use of the space at the front door by a neighbour's need for right of access.

- The Invercarron Resource Centre is not on any **local** bus routes. Those buses which do stop nearby are every two hours and within five minutes of each other; one of them (107) only passes through town stopping at Barclay Street and the far end of David Street therefore providing no useful service to the vast majority of residents seeking to reach the Resource Centre. The other (26) doesn't go beyond Westfield Road and has relatively few stops in town. Pedestrian routes to the building for those who are disabled are seriously limited to circuitous means of approach. Many such users will be forced to use taxis, including large numbers who can ill afford this.
- The building's entrance is situated on a junction that enters onto a corner of a major route in and out of town, creating serious risk of accident.
- No detailed impact assessment has been undertaken regarding transport and parking requirements that might be capable of supporting a fully operational vaccination centre.
- Despite assurances it remains difficult to see how easily Invercarron Resource Centre might be converted to the proposed use without spending significant sums of money. What is required is described as *"A large space for delivering the vaccines, one way flow through the site with separate entrance and exit, a reception, a waiting area, a post vaccination area, staff welfare areas, changing area, secure storage, PPE storage, waste storage, office space and toilets, including disabled toilet for public use."* Creating one way movement would be difficult within the building as it is at present without structural change. There could be serious issues for those who are disabled. At present all ways in or out of the building are up several steps. Ramps will need to be installed. Anyone who has visited the Centre will find it difficult to envisage where all these areas itemised above are to be found without expense.
- There is also the fundamentally important question of the fate of those elderly members of the community who currently use the building and of course all those elderly people who in future will no longer have access to this resource.
- No detailed impact assessment appears to have been carried out regarding how the permanent change of building will affect the provision of support services, including assistance with loneliness and social activities for the elderly within our community. This was addressed but what was said did not demonstrate a full understanding of the centre's use prior to Covid, mainly focusing on activities which the AHSCP themselves were directly involved with. No detailed plan seemed as yet to be in place regarding where all current, ie pre lockdown, user groups would be re-housed.
- When operated to its full potential Stonehaven Older People's Resource Centre provides an environment of mutual support, friendship and a sense of ownership. It is a place where familiarisation with the geography and facilities enables older people to feel relaxed and know where to get that cup of tea and where to sit in comfort to socialise. It also serves as a hub to pass on information about services and activities on offer. Participants may turn up for one activity and also decide to do another.

Substituting that “resource centre” experience with activities at scattered locations around Stonehaven will be a poor alternative. It will lead to increased transport costs and a very diminished sense of ownership and community. The “at home” feel created in the Centre will be lost and further increase that feeling of social isolation experienced by so many people in our community precisely at a time when everyone, but particularly older people, will need support to escape from that sense of isolation.

- SDCC believes that the decision to use the Invercarron Resource Centre as a permanent vaccination centre has been rushed, demonstrated by the lack of in depth information the team were able to provide at the recent SDCC meeting regarding the following points: Expected number of the public attending the vaccination centre each day at times of high use; Correlation of available parking space to expected or likely footfall; Limited information about what staffing levels the facility would need; Fairly generalised statements about ease of conversion.
- We believe that the decision to use the Invercarron Resource Centre as a permanent vaccination centre was too heavily influenced by the fact that the AHSCP already had financial responsibility for the running of the Invercarron Resource Centre, rather than looking in more detail at other options around Stonehaven. We realise there is no option without problems but believe that the problems presented by the preferred option are greater than those presented by some others.

We repeat our commitment to fully supporting the provision of a vaccination centre for Stonehaven, SDCC and the wider community, but we believe not enough consideration has been given to other locations within the town. We would ask the Authority to give renewed consideration to this. These could include a purpose built or modular annex (such as portacabins) being added at least temporarily to other sites, such as the Community Centre, Forest View Centre or the Kincardine Community Hospital all of which have significantly better options for parking. Another alternative may be converting the Aberdeenshire Council Housing and Finance office on Allardice Street, which we understand is currently not being used as formerly. This a matter which is of vital concern to all residents in K & M and it would be good to see cooperative working between different parts of the authority’s services to help solve the issues arising and to ensure the creation of a vaccination centre which is sustainable and not likely to need revisiting in the near future.

As a final note we’ve copied below an e mail that sums up powerfully the sense of disappointment, loss and anxiety felt by members of the community and which expresses a concern typical of communications received by Stonehaven and District Community Council

Regards



Bill Watson
Chair
SDCC

CC Aberdeenshire Councillors, Ward 18

E Mail Regarding Proposed Changes To Use Of Invercarron Resource Centre

I was only very recently made aware of the discussions about the change of use of the Invercarron Resource Centre.

I was very disappointed that it was actually through speculative discussions in the town that I did learn of the proposal. Rather than receiving information direct from Aberdeenshire Council about the proposed change of use of the Resource Centre for older people in Stonehaven.

I am also very disappointed that while you mention the change of use of the facility, you have not included suggested plans for re-siting all the activities that were previously held at the Centre. We are talking of lunch clubs, day care, exercise classes, coffee mornings to name just a handful. These are all groups and activities that have provided support, security, safety and much needed opportunities of social interaction for the older age group and their families in Stonehaven. For some families the activities have provided invaluable respite for carers. For some users it may have been the only time they have left their houses and spoken to someone else in the course of a week.

I know the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership take their responsibilities and duty of care very seriously, so whilst explaining that the Resource Centre is being re-purposed as a vaccination centre should they not also be outlining alternative plans and provision for the prior users of the building? This would be joined-up thinking. This would be seen as a positive approach by Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership to find solutions for all. I would like to think that Aberdeenshire Council could be leading the way here. The Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership could be forging greater ties with the community in being pro-active and reinstating services for the older people of our Town. This would be a great opportunity for Aberdeenshire Council and the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership to show how determined they are to serve the community and find solutions rather than just let previous users find their own way, or worse still, just not provide their services at all.

How many folk in Stonehaven with dementia, Alzheimer's, who live alone, who are recently bereaved, who have limited mobility, for example, will be losing out and losing the chance to live better lives will these plans affect?

Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership must provide services for the older people of this town. Please do don't fail them by using "COVID" and "vaccinations" as a "get-out". Please do not fail the older generation of Stonehaven. They desperately need activities, chances for social interaction and support groups. I'm sure you will agree and will therefore make every effort to provide them.

Surely, an alternative vaccination centre could be found? What about portacabins beside the leisure centre? There is parking and plenty of space. This might prove to be a cheaper option than trying to make changes to the Resource Centre. Given a few days I could probably come up with many other alternatives. But there are many heads at Aberdeenshire Council, so I'm sure you must have many tens of other suggestions yourselves that would work better than using the Resource Centre. Parking is limited at the Resource Centre and a one way system would not be easily operated.

Many Thanks