

Kelsey Park 'Aviary' toilets - update

From the committee of the Friends of Kelsey Park - October 2011

You may know that the Council has offered to convert the closed “aviary” toilets into a new Information Centre for the Friends, using money saved by the closure of park toilets earlier than originally planned, this year rather than next. The committee has accepted this offer and we would like to explain the background to this decision.

When the closure of these toilets was first proposed as part of the Council’s need to save huge sums of money from its budget, we wrote to the Council and made the case strongly for their retention and we encouraged all our members to do likewise. Unfortunately the decision was made and the toilets closed earlier this summer. The Council’s reason was because Kelsey Park already has a set of toilets by the café, towards the southern end of the park, which are to be retained, and there are also toilets next to the High Street a couple of hundred yards from the northern entrance. We argued that the “aviary” toilets were extremely useful, particularly for the elderly and children, but the Council has decided that in this extreme financial situation, with major cuts across the Council, it cannot justify having two sets of toilets in Kelsey Park, when other parks in the borough have either only one, including Crystal Palace, or none at all. The committee reluctantly concluded that the Council will just not change its mind on this issue and that therefore the “aviary” toilets will remain closed and never be re-opened, either now or any point in the future, even if economic conditions improve.

We were also very concerned about the future of the building, which is actually quite attractive and very solid. It seemed to us that if the building remained empty and unused, it would be in great danger of gradual deterioration, vandalism and perhaps eventual demolition. It would be a problem and an expense for the Council for years to come and that would be a terrible fate for such a nice building.

In view of the above factors we decided to accept the Council’s offer to convert the toilets into a new Information Centre. There have been calls for the Council to spend the proposed conversion money on keeping the toilets open but we now understand that this is not actually possible. The cost of the works is as yet unknown but the available money is in the Council’s budget for this year and apparently the rules say that it has to be spent by 31st March 2012, the end of the financial year, or it will be lost; also any year-end surplus cannot be carried over into the new financial year or subsequent years. Also, should the Council ever want to re-open the toilets at any time after the end of the financial year, when the budget disappears as a saving, it would have to find equivalent savings elsewhere in its budget to make up for it. The committee is firmly convinced that the Council will not do this at any time and that the toilets are now closed permanently.

So the committee’s conclusion was that in reality, as we think the Council will never re-open the toilets, the choice was between an empty and potentially deteriorating building which would be an eyesore and a problem in the park for years to come, or a new Information Centre with much better facilities for the public and indeed the volunteers (running water for example), opportunities to develop new services into the future, and a much better, prime location which will attract significantly more visitors. We are trying to bring something very positive for the park out of a very negative situation. The Council is currently working up detailed building plans for consultation with the committee and we will want to show these plans to the public as soon as we can.