

Clyde Museum Feasibility Study: Summary of Public Feedback and Survey from the 'I love Clyde Heritage Open Day', Sunday 1st July, 2018

Overview

In June 2018, the Central Otago District Council (CODC) launched an online public survey focused on the perceptions and importance of the existing Clyde Museum buildings (Clyde Street, Briar Herb Factory and Clyde Railway). The survey asked four simple questions designed to gauge the level of public interest, knowledge and perceptions of the museums as a precursor to the 'I love Clyde Heritage Open Day', held on Sunday 1st July, 2018. During the open day, large sheets with the four survey questions were posted at the museums along with helpers to encourage and assist visitors to write their opinions and feedback on their Clyde museums experience. It is estimated that nearly two hundred people attended the open day and we received over fifty individual written responses in total.

The combined survey information has been collated and broadly analysed for its responses to the questions and repeated key themes that were observable in the feedback. These are summarised below.

Summary of responses

Q1: Is having a museum in Clyde important to you and why?

The responses were overwhelmingly positive. Over a third of responses commented that its role in communicating and recording the community's heritage, identity and its past record was important supported by those who commented that Clyde's history was important to them in itself. The museums as a tourism and visitor asset to Clyde was also noted as important by respondents, with family ties and education for future generations given as being highlighted as well. A number of responses did not give a reason why they thought the museums were important, other than that they just were.

Q2: What would you like to see in your Clyde Museums?

A third of all responses expressed a desire to see specific, locally-focused stories of Clyde's history (people, events and local places) supported by relevant and interesting object displays that were connected to the stories. A quarter of replies wanted to see better presentation and conservation of both the displays and buildings, with some specifically stating they would like retention of the Briar Herb Factory Museum. An equal number of respondents expressed that they would like to see more technical, interactive displays with some specifically targeted at engaging children and younger museum visitors in hands-on interpretive experiences ('touch and discover' displays). Finally, a small number of respondents requested more integration between the museums and Clyde railway site and the Clyde Dam.

Q3: Is there a story you would like the museums to tell?

For this question, one third of the survey respondents did not give any direct answer, focusing either on the quality of the stories displayed or other, non-related comments. The overwhelming response – almost half - identified the stories of Clyde's local history and identities as important to tell ('new' stories mentioned were the Thyme story, women's life experiences and gold robberies). Other stories highlighted that respondents would like to see more of, were the railway to Clyde, stories from a child's perspective that could be related to by children and more bones!

Q4: Do you have a favourite item on display in the Clyde Museums? If so, what is it and why?

For this question, a quarter of the survey respondents did not give any direct answer and the remaining spread of responses was generally wide. The largest response thought that overall the museums were "fab", "love all

of it" and did not identify one specific item. Other comments highlighted the Stables, wanting to retain the Briar Herb Factory as an item, liking the Clyde Dam display, and liking the VCC Council room display as a 'living history' experience. Single comments simply liked a certain display item such as the baling machine, the cars and sheep, the court box and a gig that belonged to a local family.

Key Highlights

Overall, very positive feedback was gathered from the survey and open day for keeping a museum in Clyde, which told local and engaging stories specific to the town and its people connected with items and objects connected to those stories. There was an interesting divergence of opinion as to whether Clyde should retain one or two museums to achieve this (the balance was split roughly evenly, as we did not directly ask this question), with opinions supporting both the retention and non-retention of both the Blyth Street and Briar Herb Factory museums. The overwhelming feedback was that a Clyde Museum was good for the community, tourism and was a way to promote and share its unique historic identity through its own stories, people and objects.

Many of the responses noted the good job that the CHM were already doing with the Blyth Street museum (and the BHM when it was open previously), but that there was scope for altering and improving the displays in the museums with more modern, interactive and intergenerational exhibits possible. The need for interactive and 'discovery'-type sessions for young visitors was noted several times. At the other end of the scale, the 'historic' and 'cluttered' experience provided by the Briar Herb Factory site, in particular the Stables and Blacksmiths, was noted by several respondents as being of particular appeal, and which made the experience unique compared to other, presumably less cluttered museums!

In conclusion, the initial public consultation was a success in that we received a good range of responses with some great comments and suggestions from people across the age range. Although no clear preference could be inferred regarding the way forward for the museum buildings themselves in terms of spatial rationalisation, there was definitely a view that the Briar Herb Factory story has heritage value to the Clyde Community that it would like retained in some form.