

PAUL RABBITS FRSA FLI

Author, Park Historian and Lecturer

48 New Road

Leighton Buzzard

Bedfordshire

LU7 2LX

24th August 2019

Robin Tuddenham
Chief Executive
Calderdale Council
Town Hall,
Crossley Street
Halifax
West Yorkshire
HX1 1UJ.

Dear Mr Tuddenham

Todmorden – Centre Vale Park Bandstand

I am writing to you in your capacity as Chief Executive of Calderdale Council with regards to the recent council decision to demolish the iconic bandstand in Todmorden. First of all, if I can introduce myself. I am currently Head of Parks, Open Spaces & Projects for Watford Borough Council and have worked in the public sector for nearly 30 years. As well as being a Fellow of the Landscape Institute, I am (humbly) considered an expert in the field of bandstands, their history and their value to communities. Over many years, I have been involved in projects that have seen bandstands restored across the UK, from Middlesbrough, Hawick, Leamington Spa, Swanage, Rugby, Watford, Sherborne and Hull. I have published 4 books on the subject of bandstands and assisted groups where I can in getting their bandstands restored and re-used. This has led to two websites I have developed but in particular www.pavilionsformusic.co.uk.

My reason for telling you this is that I understand the value of bandstands to local communities but also the immense pressure that local authorities are under. I absolutely get this. However, at the same time, when I see an issue that arises such as the decision to

demolish the bandstand in Todmorden, and the public outcry this has, then, I do feel I need to voice my concerns.

So, to your bandstand! Opened in 1914, and incredibly unique in design, yours is valuable partly because of its design and partly because it appears that your local community value this. At one stage, there were over 1,500 bandstands in the country, mainly of the cast iron and circular design, the perfect example you have in People's Park, in Halifax. A very small number were designed as open fronted 'theatre' style bandstands, and very few of these now exist. A 'restored' example is in Oak Hill Park, Accrington, same style as yours and open fronted ones exist in Walsall Arboretum, Royal Victoria Park in Bath, and another in Clarence Park in Wakefield. Since the advent of the Heritage Lottery Fund in 1996, over 120 bandstands have been refurbished, restored and where lost, replaced, either as part of a wider park restoration scheme or as an individual bandstand restoration project. We are seeing a wonderful revival in bandstands across the UK and they are still incredibly well loved. We had the 2012 Bandstand Marathon and since then we have seen bandstands bouncing to rock, rhythm and blues, brass, reggae, choral, and on my bandstand in Watford, I have had everything from yoga, Morris dancing to cookery demonstrations.

Your bandstand is special, very special and despite austerity, is a valuable part of your heritage. You are a council that has restored the Piece Hall and People's Park in Halifax, both stunning projects and in my lectures on parks, People's Park by Joseph Paxton features highly – it is such an important park. So, as a public authority, we have an obligation to protect, value, preserve and restore our heritage. This has to include such features as your bandstand in Todmorden. I have seen the outcry from local people since the decision was made. In the last 20 years, we have only lost one bandstand that I am aware of – this was in Ryelands Park in Lancaster. It was heritage vandalism and the outcry was shocking.

So, what would I suggest to Calderdale Council.

1. Halt the decision to demolish the bandstand and to look at what the options are. I have seen some of the proposals and I consider the only option here is to restore the bandstand.
2. Obtain a full condition survey of the bandstand with a view to see it restored. I gather it was restored in 2000, but badly and now suffers terrible vandalism. The survey must be done by an authority on bandstand restoration and in the UK, there is only one worth considering, and this is Lost Art who are based in Wigan.

<http://www.lostart.co.uk/bandstands.html> . They are THE experts. For a few hundred quid, they will give you a report on the bandstand with options to restore and costs. Contact is Dominic Liptrot.

3. Call an open meeting to gauge real opinion for the bandstand. This was done in Swanage and over 220 people attended a meeting I chaired and presented to.
4. Funding – this needs to be sought and whether from your stretched capital programme or from grant applications. The National Lottery Heritage Fund will now fund projects within parks that do not necessarily mean doing the whole park. This is what is being attempted in Beckenham on the Bowie bandstand which hit the headlines last week when it was listed. In fact, if your bandstand was listed, it would mean a greater chance of grant funding. You have allocated significant funding to the Piece Hall. This is a small amount in comparison. There are grants to go for: Veolia Environmental Trust, Biffa Award – I am sure that you are aware of these and others.
5. Re-use – clearly there is a desire from the local community to see this restored but re-used. If it's used it is less likely to be abused. Why can't the Town Council take ownership of the bandstand from the point of view of getting it used. Think beyond Brass bands, open it up to community use and community bookings. As a space, these are incredibly valuable. You cannot put a value on this with so many excellent examples across the UK.
6. Re-design it so that it is sustainable. Vandalism is clearly an issue but if it is restored and made inaccessible when not in use, whether through shutters or bars or the whole thing is fenced off. Design out the opportunities.

In summary, this is a bandstand that really needs to be restored but I would urge you to think beyond the limited options presented and the long-term benefits of this iconic piece of heritage. It is so important that despite austerity, we attempt to preserve and restore our cultural heritage. Joseph Paxton the great designer of People's Park would expect nothing less.

Paul Rabbitts



Oak Hill Park, Accrington





Walsall Arboretum



Wakefield, Clarence Park

cc. Cllr Tim Swift, Leader of the Council
Cllr Susan Mary Press Cabinet Member - Public Services and Communities
Cllr Jane Scullian - Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member - Regeneration & Resources
Cllr Silvia Dacre and Cllr Steve Sweeney, Todmorden Councillor
Karen Andrews – Chair of Friends of Centre Vale Park