

Mayor of Zedelgem

Dear Mr Burie,

With this letter, the municipality would like to inform you of the results of last week's expert workshop (26 & 27/11) concerning 'The Latvian Hive' and the prisoner of war camp in Vloethemveld.

In response to the controversy over the 'Latvian Hive' artwork, an international group of historians met last week at the request of the municipality of Zedelgem. This is with the aim of formulating independent and motivated advice on the future of the 'Latvian hive' and the public development of the prisoner of war camp in Vloethemveld.

This workshop was the last of several actions proposed by the municipality to respond to the controversy around the hive. Before that, the explanatory plaque has already been removed and the city council has recently taken the first steps to change the name of the square on which the work of art (*Brivibaplein*) is located to 'Peerdenbilk', the original name. The controversy of recent months, the progress made and especially the advice of experts, have opened the eyes of the municipality to the complexity of this story.

The municipality does not want to circumvent this history, but wants to explore and study it more deeply, together with the international network we have built now. As the experts concluded, the municipality had never wanted to pay tribute to the Nazi regime, nor to excuse certain war crimes or knowingly hurt citizens with the creation of the Latvian hive.

The future of the Latvian hive

As advised by the experts and after coordination with the Latvian partners, the hive will be removed from its current place and a reflection phase, in which the experts will continue to support the municipality, will be introduced. During this period, the municipality will take the initiative to consult all parties involved in order to propose a sustained and thoughtful solution of a permanent place for the Latvian hive.

The municipality wants to continue to invest in good cooperation with Latvia (where the panel of experts also sees potential) and to expand this bilateral relationship at European level. These relations are so important in the European context. This allows us to broaden our perspective and teaches us to see history with a critical and diverse mind.

Opportunities for the Vloethemveld project

The expert group was impressed by the potential of the Vloethemveld site. They advised to keep in touch with the participating international experts and expand it even further. This workshop could then be the beginning of the development of a network of prisoner of war camps. Together with our partners, the municipality will examine in more detail whether and how such a challenge can be met.

The content of the workshop opened the eyes of the municipality of Zedelgem and made us understand that the history of the prisoner of war camp needs to be deepened and even better explained when Vloethemveld is opened to the public.

The contacts established during the workshop are certainly important for the development of historical research on and around Vloethemveld. For example, students (master's or doctorate) and historians may be challenged to deepen their knowledge of this field.

Finally, the Municipality of Zedelgem would like to thank the panel of experts one last time for the thoughtful and professional advice.

The full advice of the panel is available via this link: <https://www.belgiumwwii.be/debats/l-heritage-du-camp-de-prisonniers-de-guerre-britannique-sur-le-site-du-vloethemveld.html>

With kind regards

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