THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD TO DIGNITY

By Neil Starkie

This morning, some external works began outside my office window at The Spiers Centre in Heathridge, and Tommy, our landscape contractor was listening to a soundtrack that was unmistakable. Somewhere among the hum of machinery and the scrape of shovels, *The Long and Winding Road* by The Beatles, drifted through the air. It felt fitting.

At The Spiers Centre, we walk alongside people whose lives have rarely followed a straight line. For many, the road has been long, uncertain, and shaped by hardship, trauma, and disruption. Our role is not to rush that journey, but to create spaces, physical and relational, that offer safety, dignity, and welcome along the way.

Today marks the beginning of an important step on that road.

Thanks to a pre-election funding commitment from our local member, Emily Hamilton MLA, we have commenced works to improve the physical environment of our Heathridge centre. This investment allows us to translate intention into action, ensuring the way our space looks and feels reflects the care, respect, and compassion that sit at the heart of our service.

The first phase of works now underway focuses on landscaping and the creation of new seating areas. These are not cosmetic upgrades, they are a deliberate move towards a Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) - one that recognises how deeply space, safety, and dignity influence how people feel when they seek support.

For someone arriving for an appointment, the experience of waiting matters. Being able to sit in a welcoming outdoor space, rather than standing or perching uncomfortably, communicates something powerful before a single word is spoken: *you are welcome here; you matter.*

There will always be different ways of seeing decisions like this. Recently, someone commented that creating seating areas might “encourage loitering.” I understand that perspective. It reflects a very real tension between risk and welcome, order and dignity. We chose to see the glass half full.

From a Psychologically Informed Environment perspective, seating is not about loitering, it is about safety, regulation, and respect.

It acknowledges that people often arrive early, anxious, hungry, tired, or overwhelmed. Having a place to sit can be the difference between escalation and calm, disengagement and trust.

As the music played on outside, another Beatles lyric came to mind, from Across the Universe: *"Nothing's gonna change my world."*

It felt like a quiet reminder that values matter most when they are tested and that choosing dignity, even when it feels uncomfortable, is often where the real work begins.

This focus on the physical environment is a key part of our broader trauma-informed approach. Psychologically Informed Environments recognise that relationships are central to change but those relationships are shaped by the spaces in which they occur. A calm, non-institutional setting helps people regulate, engage, and feel safe enough to take the next step.

The second phase of this project will see the installation of a purpose-designed sea container, which will become the new home of our free clothing service, Community Closet. This space will allow people to select clothing in a way that is respectful, dignified, and welcoming not rushed, not exposed, and not transactional.

Clothing may seem like a small thing. But the ability to choose what you wear, to feel comfortable and presentable, can restore a sense of control and self-worth that hardship so often erodes.

As The Long and Winding Road played on this morning, one line lingered:

"The long and winding road that leads to your door…"

At The Spiers Centre, our door is here for people at many different points along their journey. These works are about ensuring that when people arrive however long or winding their road has been, they are met with dignity, warmth, and a space that reflects our belief in their worth.

We are deeply grateful for the support that has made this possible, and we look forward to seeing these spaces come to life in the weeks ahead.

The road continues. And today, it feels like it's leading somewhere good.