

## Comment on a planning application

### Application Details

**Application:** 21/0847/FUL

**Address:** The One O Clock Club Marble Hill Park Richmond Road Twickenham TW1 2NL

**Proposal:** Demolition of the existing buildings and erection of a new building for use as a children's play space, nursery and community hub (Class E(f), Class F2), installation of landscaping and associated works

### Comments Made By

**Name:** Mrs Katy Grieves

**Address:** PLOUGH HOUSE BACK STREET ASHTON KEYNES SN6 6PD

### Comments

**Type of comment:** Support the proposal

**Comment:** Although I've recently moved out of the area, I was Chair of Marble Hill Playcentres from 2017 (when we formed a new board to try and rescue the Playcentres from closure) up until mid 2019.

Throughout these two years as Chair, I lived and breathed the Playcentres. Living just around the corner and visiting the centre almost daily with my two young children. I saw and experienced first hand how the Playcentres was about so much more than 'just play' in the support it offers to families and how transformatively the seeming simplicity of 'just play' teaches children so much about how to cope in life and how to enjoy it too. For those families without their own gardens or safe places to play in, our free access for those who need it, provided a lifeline.

The centre had repeatedly been at risk of closure for many years and above all, our board of trustees wanted to look much further ahead, to find a solution to ensure that this much loved community asset was safe for future generations. No more sticking plasters.

How could we do this we asked ourselves?

Well, we took a very long hard look at the financials from every angle and we talked to our community. We spoke to mums and dads, carers and grandparents, our affluent locals and those who were struggling, staff and volunteers, our neighbours, our on-site nursery, the environmental groups, the heritage groups, local funders, local councillors, local professionals, local charities, local MPs, local teachers, the local church, we did a local survey and received over 1,000 responses, my husband never wanted to hear me mention 'the Playcentres' ever again, it was all-consuming.

The result though was clear and irrefutable. The only way to secure a sustainable future, was to rebuild the crumbling centre so that it could open all year around, come rain or shine and to work in partnership with others to improve our services. We tried to think of any other possible ways to avoid what we knew would be a hugely exhausting, expensive and time-consuming solution, but we ended up back at the same place. The only long-term solution was a rebuild. And this solution offered not only a sustainable financial future, but one in which we believed we should even be able to generate a surplus to reinvest back into our community.

And why did we need to work in partnership with others? Well, in essence because funding and fundraising capacity for community services is stretched to its limit and small charities are stronger together. On top of this, the Playcentres needed partners with extensive SEN expertise and experience to enable the Playcentres to be fully inclusive for children with additional needs. We asked the local experts who we should partner with and two much loved and long-established local charities (who were looking for a permanent home) were proposed to us: OKMT and Skylarks.

We may be three separate charities but we all serve the same community of families. And the juices flowed as we put our heads together and saw that our synergies would make us so much more together than the sum of our parts. As is so

often the case in life, by sharing, we were all gaining. Our traditional Playcentres remit of 'play' and 'support' would remain at the heart of the centre, but be available for ALL and be of a much better quality.

There are so few opportunities in life to really make a lasting difference. To know that what is being created will endure and change many lives for the better. That this model of co-operation and synergy and true inclusivity could inspire us all and might even be a model to inspire other community charities too. To create a safe place for all our families to be happy, together, harmoniously in the beauty of Marble Hill Park. Yes, there's a lot of work and a huge amount of fundraising to make this dream a reality, but one step at a time. And to achieve planning permission is a critical next step and I hope with all my heart it will succeed.