

Dear Residents,

23-25 North Birkbeck Road: A New Development

We are writing to let you know of our intention to develop 23-25 North Birkbeck Road as a new High Needs Centre and Family Resilience Centre. The existing building was previously used as the Leytonstone Learning Link, and we are proposing to demolish this and create a new place for some of the most vulnerable children in the Borough.

Background

Delivering a new High Needs Centre and Family Resilience Centre is a central pillar of the Council's 'Families at the Heart of our Place' strategy, which includes bespoke provision for children excluded from school. Providing this new facility is an opportunity for the Council to deliver 'wraparound' services to some of our most vulnerable children whilst supporting key Council priorities.

In January 2020 the Council adopted a new strategy to improve inclusion for children excluded from school. There is a legal duty to make this provision. This will involve satellites in several secondary schools. These will support excluded children in the expectation that they will return to their own school after a few weeks. However, there are some children who cannot return to school. These children will often be offered a place at the new High Needs Centre.

Our plans

The proposal is to co-locate the High Needs Centre (HNC) and Family Resilience Centre in a brand-new facility at 23-25 North Birkbeck Road. Co-location will make it easier for services to work together for the benefit of the children, their carers, and the wider Waltham Forest community.

The High Needs Centre will serve a maximum of twenty children with high levels of educational need and most of whom will have been permanently excluded from school. The children will be attending full-time during an extended school day (7am-6pm). The facilities will allow them to continue learning English and Maths but also offering art, music, drama, and sports facilities that support them in managing trauma and aids their recovery. Employment skills in construction and catering will also be available to students. A range of therapy and counselling spaces and services will be provided. The Centre will be managed by Belmont Park School. The new facilities, particularly the Sports Hall and Music Technology space, could also allow for out of hours community use.

The Family Resilience Centre will accommodate the Youth Offending Service, currently based about half a mile away at Rowan House in Cecil Road. At the new Centre there will be counselling and therapy for children who have come into contact with the justice system and their carers, providing family therapy and restorative justice programmes. Some children will attend evening sessions and the Centre is likely to be open between 7am and 10pm with Saturday and Sunday hours probably being 10am to 4pm. This is part of the Council's commitment to the "Child First, Offender Second" approach to youth justice and this was approved by the Council on 3 December 2020.

Demolition of the existing building is planned over the period from mid-August to mid-October this year and, subject to gaining planning permission, we will begin building the new Centres in early 2022. A planning application will be submitted in mid-August 2021.

The existing building is two storey and we have no plan to go above that height with our new building. We have included images of how the building will look and there will be an opportunity to comment on the planning application once submitted.

A virtual discussion (probably via Zoom) will take place soon where the architects, and the people managing

the Centres, will be able to answer any questions you have at this stage. Details will be available on the project website at <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/northbirkbeck-learninglink> where you can subscribe for updates on the project.

You can also contact us by email if you have any questions and comments. Our email address is northbirkbeck@walthamforest.gov.uk and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

David Kilgallon
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