

Dear Sir/Madam,

As the Surrey County Councillor for Haslemere I fully support the current planning application to restore and convert Undershaw to permit the expansion of Stepping Stones school, on the grounds that the expansion in the provision of educational places for Surrey's children with special needs is unquestionably in the public interest.

Furthermore Surrey County Council directorate for Schools and Learning has stated that "the County Council would positively welcome its expansion as a local provision as something that would provide a real benefit to the citizens of Surrey".

Stepping Stones is a first class provider of care and education for young people with hemiplegia, autistic spectrum and for those with acute or chronic medical conditions, with a range of physical disabilities and those youngsters whose mental and/or emotional health is at risk. There is a chronic national shortage of adequate provision for children with these conditions.

All pupils at Stepping Stones are in receipt of full Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND) statements funded by local authorities under national legislation (currently 50% of pupils are fully funded by SCC). Furthermore the Children and Families Bill, September 2014 requires that local authorities develop Education, Health and Care plans for all SEND children, and extend their education and training provision up to the age of 25.

The opportunity for Stepping Stones to expand its campus to include Undershaw is critically important. The current premises are not fully adapted or capable of improvement to meet the needs of the children and demands on the school. Stepping Stones was founded ten years ago in a church hall with three pupils and now has thirty-eight pupils, with a waiting list reflecting the outstanding quality of education that the school offers.

The applied-for modifications to Undershaw will ensure the long-term provision of these much needed educational services. Moreover, the transfer of Stepping Stones to Undershaw will liberate the current school buildings for conversion to a purpose built vocational training centre for 19-25 year olds with special needs. Improving access to employment and independent living for these young people is of in addition of considerable public benefit.

I trust that Waverley's Southern Planning Committee will prioritise, in its deliberation, the important public benefit that would be derived if Undershaw were to be converted, enabling Stepping Stones to provide an outstanding education and training to more of our most vulnerable young people.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Nikki Barton
Surrey County Councillor for Haslemere