**Florence Park Children's Centre**

**A SUMMARY OF THE PROCESS SO FAR and LATEST UPDATE August 2017**

**Lots more info at:** [**www.florenceparkoasiscentre.weebly.com**](http://www.florenceparkoasiscentre.weebly.com)

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**THE PROCESS SO FAR**

* For over 16 months, officers and councillors of both Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council, along with community groups and local residents, have been working together to agree the best community use of Florence Park Children’s Centre as part of Oxfordshire County Council’s “Transition Fund for Community Initiatives for Open Access Children's Services”. Over three initial bidding rounds, the process became complicated by a range of issues. Everyone is working extremely hard to find the best solution and get the Centre open and used by the community.
* A community bid was considered in November 2016 and resubmitted in February 2017 by local Community Interest Company *The Nature Effect*. It proposed an ‘Oasis’ open to all (including a good-food café and a 24-place nature-based nursery). The County Council report cited the main reason for not accepting this proposal was Oxford City Council’s exclusive contract with the existing park café. Due to the hard work and perseverance of all parties, Oxford City Council subsequently determined this is no longer an obstacle. The community proposal was then taken up by Aspire Oxford (a local Charity and social enterprise). This has gained huge support from local residents and groups, and received over 1,500 signatures on a petition to keep the Centre as a community asset and open-access for all. Aspire’s bid was turned down in June 2017:
* Although bids for the transition fund were only open to non-profit groups, an existing local private nursery, Aflah, was also put forward as eligible to apply to take on the lease of the building or occupy space within it, and this was the option recommended to Oxfordshire County Council cabinet in June 2017. The reason cited for this was the need for 40 more childcare places in the area as part of Oxfordshire’s statutory duty to ensure “childcare sufficiency”. Following concerns by some councillors and members of the public at Cabinet meetings about the application of due process criteria, Aflah Nursery and Aspire were asked to explore whether they could develop a joint-use bid.

**LATEST UPDATE**

* Following a recent meeting with Aspire and Aflah, it is clear that the space requirements for each are incompatible and that a joint bid is not possible. The two groups have been asked to submit revised bids by 25th August, for a decision to be made by Cabinet on 19th September. The Council have also reduced the requirement for open-access to “at least two open-access sessions a week”.
* A group of local residents have created a campaign group/steering group to support the Aspire bid. It is hoped that Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council can work with Aflah Nursery to find more suitable premises for a private nursery, and ensure that Florence Park Children’s Centre is run as a community-owned initiative, creating local services, local jobs, open access to the community all through the week and year funded by local enterprises whose profits are ploughed back into the community. This proposal includes:
* free drop-in sessions, including Stay and Play, and parenting classes
* a new nursery with lots of outdoor play, using the park setting
* wrap-around and holiday care- open to all
* meeting rooms and flexible workspaces for hire
* a community café offering fresh, healthy food
* This model fully complies with Oxfordshire County Council Community Asset Transfer policy, the criteria for the Transition Fund grant for open access services for children and families, and is very much in keeping with Oxfordshire Together, Oxford City priorities for children, families and communities, and the ambitions of the Oxfordshire Local Economic Partnership.
* At the recent Elder Stubbs Festival, the community support for the Aspire proposal was really encouraging, with over 45 offers of volunteer support with relevant skills and experience. There was also real concern and bewilderment about the possibility of this going to a private business.
* The Aspire-led bid has now been submitted and we await the recommendation to Cabinet.