



25 March 2011

Little Dragons - the bungalow, Leonard Cheshire (Seven Rivers site)

Key facts:

- To provide the very best services to our children & parents/carers, we need our own building.
- Our recent OFSTED inspection would have graded us as “outstanding”, but for the restraints of our current building (e.g. no direct/free access to outdoor learning area for children and restricted opening times).
- We are looking to move to the bungalow in the Seven Rivers site, around September 2011.
- We have **no** plans to demolish the bungalow. Some internal alterations; replacement of the current fence (with a low level picket fence); and provision of a small number of car parking spaces (backing onto the Seven Rivers car parking spaces) are all we currently propose to do.
- Our plans do not alter the character of the local area, and there will be no adverse impact from a visual perspective.
- We will continue to share our plans with the community, and where possible, we will amend them to address concerns.

Background

As you may be aware, Little Dragons pre-school has been looking for an alternative location in which to hold the setting. Our search for premises closer to St George's school has been ongoing since 2009. We have made no secret of this.

We have invested a substantial amount of time into finding a suitable alternative location from which:

- staff do not waste vast amounts of time setting up and packing away (e.g. carpets, furniture, equipment, displays etc.) at the beginning or end of sessions;
- we can offer more flexible services to parents/carers;
- we can better meet the needs of the children; and
- we can comply with legislation and standards in pre-school education.

We have had our ups and downs during our search over the past two years, with plans falling at the last hurdle due to unforeseen circumstances. This has been very disappointing for all children, staff and stakeholders concerned. It was only prudent and good sense that we should consider all options for an alternative premises, and wait until we had some firm news, before sharing information more widely.

I am conscious, however, that there has been some coverage on this in Great Bromley village over the past weeks. Unfortunately what has been said by some bears **no** resemblance to what we are proposing. For example, a rumour that we were looking to demolish the bungalow on the Seven Rivers site – which is **completely untrue**. To avoid further unnecessary concern, we thought it best to share our current plans with you now.

Current plans

Our first two attempts to secure alternative premises within the heart of the village unfortunately failed (e.g. withdrawal of Government funding, due to the economic climate). However, because of the kindness of a private investor (who is willing to support the pre-school in our wish to remain in the village), we have been able to enter into negotiations with Leonard Cheshire to purchase the bungalow in the Seven Rivers site.

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This enables us to keep our original goal i.e. to move closer to St George's school (with whom we have established excellent links) and to the Parish Church (with whom we want to build stronger links). Being able to walk children safely to and from the school or church is high on our agenda.

We will remain a charitable non-profit making organisation. Our plans for the bungalow remain modest - our intention is to use the existing bungalow with the minimal amount of change and disruption possible, to enable us to continue to deliver high quality services for up to 24 children (the maximum we are currently registered for).

Consultation & planning permission

We invited those residents who will be our future "neighbours" to an information evening on Monday 14 March. We shared our plans and listened carefully to concerns. As a result, we have already decided to make some alterations in response.

An small exhibition is being organised for our fun day on 26 March to share the Pre-School's vision for the bungalow with the public invited to make comment on the plans. These comments will be considered, before a planning application - for a "change of use" - is submitted to Tendring DC. Only once the purchase of the bungalow is complete, will we submit a change of use application. We are hopeful that the purchase will be completed within the next couple of weeks.

Summary

It is sometimes difficult to strike the right balance between being open with everyone, and sharing information that is fruitless. As a registered charity, run by a committee, we collectively made the decision not to raise false hopes of children, parents/carers and staff too early in the current negotiation process.

However, as we move forward, we shall look to keep you, along with other local communities in the Parish, as informed and up-to-date as possible.

We strive to ensure that our Pre-School delivers real benefits for all who live and work in the Great Bromley, Frating and other surrounding areas. We are very proud of our roots in the community.

We are delighted to have the backing of Mrs Fitzgerald at St George's School, the early years education team at Essex County Council and OFSTED for our plans. We hope we can count on your support when our "change of use" application is submitted to Tendring DC.

Yours sincerely,

Declan Montgomery (Secretary)
Carole Davidson (Treasurer)

Jean Chubb (Chair)
Karen Montgomery (Manager)

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