HPK/2013/0558
HIGH PEAK
29 NOV 2013
BOROUGH COUNCIL

PP-02936183

Overview of Overlea farm activities

We work with young people from schools across Derbyshire and Manchester who for a variety of reasons, are not fully integrated in main stream education. Many have barriers to learning and inclusion including Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, brain injuries and mental health needs. We offer a range of educational and vocational training opportunities through our training centres in Tameside and Salford as well as the farm provision in Derbyshire. Learners attend the farm for 3-4 hours per day, with different groups each day and with 1:1 supervision.

A selected number of young people gain very significant learning and development opportunities when working with small animals in a farm environment, responding very positively to their interaction with animals in a safe environment. They also gain considerable learning from horticulture/agricultural opportunities at the farm.

The farm has a variety of small animals including goats, chickens, micro pigs, a small herd of alpacas and a number of horses. Young people attending the farm have an opportunity to:

- Appreciate and adhere to the RSPCA's 'Five freedoms for animals' policy'
- Groom and feed animals
- Study the breeding cycle of animals
- Have the opportunity to care for animals in a natural environment
- To work as a member of a team and form relationships with peers
- To enjoy working in an outdoor environment

Through the horticulture and agricultural provision young people are having an opportunity to grow vegetables, flowers and plants in a safe and healthy environment and to develop their knowledge of healthy living as well as their respect for nature.

The changing/dining area is used as follows:

- As a changing room for young people to put on safety boots and overalls when they arrive onsite
- A classroom for small group instruction on animal care and horticulture and for learners writing up their learning logs
- A refreshment area and shelter in inclement weather for staff and students
- First aid facility
- Toilet facility

The development of the farm provision has created an additional six full time employment posts (instructors/support workers).

Summary

Young people with a range of learning barriers have attended Overlea Farm over the past few months and it is hard not to overstate the tremendous success we have had with young people, some of whom have extreme difficulties communicating with others or forming meaningful relationships. However, these same young people have been able to develop interests and relationships when working with small animals in a farm environment.

In the event that we fail to gain planning approval and have to demolish and remove the changing room facilities, it would be necessary for us to cease having young people at the farm since we would not be able to provide shelter in inclement weather conditions. This would have a devastating effect on the young people who have come to love their time each week at the farm. You will also see from the additional evidence that we have enclosed (item 6), that both schools and parents are extremely supportive of the learning opportunities presented at the farm.

We do realise that we have made a grave error in erecting the changing room without planning permission. However, we would ask you and the panel to take a compassionate view of this application.

Mrs Wendy Martin
Overlea Farm