

Gazette

COMMENT

Was £30k money well spent?

COLCHESTER Council's decision to spend £30,000 on a feasibility study into the former Jacks Famous Supplies shop will raise a few eyebrows.

What exactly did the authority hope to learn from such a report?

We accept a degree of investigation is needed when planning the future of such an old building.

You wouldn't buy a house, let alone one dating back so far, without carrying out all the necessary, and often expensive, surveys.

But the scope of this report appears to have drifted into the realms of the bleeding obvious.

The site has been a shop since the Victorian times.

It is in a prime town centre location which would also make a good spot for some flats.

The council didn't need to pay anyone to tell it that.

To reiterate, taxpayers will fully understand that some advice needs to be bought in when dealing with old buildings and the like.

However, a lot of the information gained from this study could surely have been provided from within the council's own ranks.

What does it pay its officers for if it is not to provide some of this expertise?

Market condition surveys, cost plans and planning advice are luxuries the council can ill-afford to commission frivolously at the same time as making huge savings in the wake of funding cuts.

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CATALYST CHARITY



I could see a vast improvement in Alfie's tolerance to other children. They also taught me strategies to handle him

■ Lifeline – mum
Anna Cunningham
with son, Alfie
Picture:
NIGEL BROWN
CO114392_006

By WENDY BRADING
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STEPPING Stones nursery and playgroup is one of the good causes to benefit from a grant from the Colchester Catalyst Charity.

Anna Cunningham knows the importance of the money to the Colchester-based group, which has changed her life.

Mrs Cunningham found taking her son, Alfie, to mother and toddler groups traumatic. He could not socialise or share and was aggressive to other children.

So she stopped going to her local group.

She said: "He would get really distressed. He was about a year old, but he just could not cope with other children."

"I just stopped going. Friends would say 'come over'. I desperately wanted to see them, but it was such a traumatic experience for both of us."

"Alfie found many places and situations too much to cope with."

"I couldn't take him into any shops, going to the park became impossible if other children were there and play dates were too stressful for both of us and they stopped."

"Home and the car were the only places he was happy – or just outside in the buggy."

"Life became isolated for both of us."

Mrs Cunningham, 36, thought she had been a confident mum with her older children, Sophie, now 18, and Luke, 15.

She added: "With Alfie, I felt desperately sad he struggled so much to play with other children."

It was a lonely time for her. Husband, Dan, supported her and the family as much as he could, but her was away a lot, working as a site manager.

Eventually she was thrown a lifeline when she learned about about Stepping Stones.

She said: "On our first visit to the tots' group, I was sick with worry."

"I was worried Alfie would hit the other children, but the staff were so welcoming."

Hospice gets £9,800 to set up a rehab room for its independent living service

ST Helena Hospice, Colchester, has been awarded £9,800 by the Colchester Catalyst Charity to help fund a new rehabilitation service.

The money has been given to set up an independent living

service, using equipment which helps patients to improve their independence and stay in their homes for longer.

The catalyst charity has also been working closely with the Big Lottery Fund to support projects in north east Essex.

As a result, the hospice was successful in receiving an extra £10,000 from the lottery's Awards For All programme.

At the hospice's base in the Highwoods area of Colchester, a room has now been split into two.

In one half is a "home" section with a kitchen, bed, stairs and a

toilet area, while in the other, is a gym.

Rachel Ready, clinical rehabilitation manager at St Helena Hospice, said: "This dedicated specialist rehabilitation and independent living skills room has allowed us to offer a level of support we could only dream of previously."

"We can now provide scheduled and structured individual sessions and group work which help patients in a much more intensive way."

"We have had some great results enabling patients to go home earlier."

Sarah Green, the director of income generation at St Helena Hospice, said: "Both help patients to learn valuable lessons in mental and physical independence."

"By Colchester Catalyst Charity bringing a number of funders together, it has allowed more charities to be eligible to apply for larger sums of money, which we have benefited from."

"Through these projects the hospice will be able to help and support thousands more patients, plus their families and carers, at a vulnerable point in their lives."

It has allowed us to offer a level of support we could only dream of previously. We've had some great results