

Planning Statement

**For an amendment to approved structures and increased attendees
at Flying High Outdoor Nursery on land at
Coombes Valley RSPB Reserve, Six Oaks Farm,
Bradnop, Leek, Staffordshire, ST13 7EU**

Kirsty Nelson

Amendment to Planning permission for Forest School Nursery on land at Coombes Valley RSPB Reserve

Summary

This statement has been prepared by K Nelson to accompany a planning application for an amendment to approved structures and additional attendees on land at Coombes Valley RSPB Reserve, Six Oak Farms, Bradnop, Leek, Staffordshire, ST13 7EU.

This is an amended application following approval for the nursery in June 2020. The nursery has been open since July 2020 and has proven to be popular with the local community, attendees, staff, the RSPB and visitors to the reserve.

This application is to request permission to:

- Replace the approved “Bell Tent” on our original application with a wooden structure. The tent has proven to be unfit for purpose and has deteriorated during our first winter, the wooden structure would create more reliable shelter and protect the children from extremes in weather, specifically heavy rain and direct sun.
- We have replaced a “Canopy” over the kitchen area with a simple wood and felt roof to protect staff from weathers while preparing food and conducting hygiene routines such as cleaning and washing up. This roof also reduces the amount of debris and insects which may fall onto the food preparation area, reducing the bio-load and making the surfaces easier to keep hygienic. We are seeking retrospective permission for this structure to remain.
- We are currently running the nursery with a maximum of 15 children attending on weekdays all year around. Due to popularity, we would like to increase this number to include an additional 10 children one day per week in order to provide a Home Education session for older children.

The site and its surrounding

The land is owned by the RSPB and this application is made with the Society’s awareness and full support.

The site is 0.1 hectares of grass enclosed from the public by dry stone walls on three sides with a post and rail fence along the NW boundary.

The land generally slopes towards the SE boundary. There is also a slope towards the SW wall and a large dip half way along the NW wall.

The site is accessed via the car park located directly north, beyond which is the visitors’ reception centre, reserve management office and accommodation for RSPB volunteers. A hardcore footpath runs the length of the NW site boundary. There are brambles running alongside the path that are enclosed with a dry stone wall which marks the edge of the reserve. Beyond the wall is a public road (Apesford Lane) and Ballfields Farm opposite.

To the SW is a grassed area with fenced-in pond, craft barn and a yurt. These structures are used for school visits and other activities run by the RSPB and can be hired by the general public.

Beyond the SE wall is an area of trees and scrub. There is a picnic area to the NE. Directly east is a footpath which gives access to the rest of the reserve from the visitors centre and is open to a large meadow.

Further S is woodland in which a Play Trail has been constructed which is used by RSPB visitors. Beyond the fairly flat Play Trail is the rest of the reserve. This is a large expanse of woodland with steep slopes to the valley floor with a river. There are a number of open fields or meadows which are used for grazing.

The site has been developed in accordance with the approved plans to include a wooden toilet shed, a wooden summer house and breeze block kitchen area.

Description of the proposal

Flying High Outdoor Nursery opened in July 2020 and accommodates up to 15 children supervised by up to 4 staff. Children are currently dropped off at nursery between 08:00 and 09:00 and are collected between 15:30 and 17:30 Monday to Friday. The nursery is registered with Ofsted who have been to site several times since we opened, they are happy with our offering.

Request for increased attendees

Due to increased demand, we propose to increase this number to 25 on one day per week to accommodate Electively Home Educated children. The additional children will be dropped off at 09:00 and collected at 15:00 to reduce congestion in the carpark. A fifth staff member will be required to ensure high levels of health and safety are maintained. This fifth member will commute to site with another team member to keep the number of cars parked all day to 4.

To minimise any potential disturbance to neighbours, these additional 10 children will spend much of their day exploring the wider reserve, putting distance between them and neighbouring houses. They will explore the reserve in areas currently accessed by the general public, reducing the ecological impact as much as possible. We will work closely with the staff at the RSPB to monitor our ecological impact and make changes wherever necessary. We will also assist with using various measures if an area becomes worn from our use. For example, we will stop using a footpath if it becomes heavily worn to allow it to recover. We will teach the children to respect the flora and fauna living on the reserve and help them understand the impact of their actions on the area, paying particular note to protecting the SSSI land. We believe these lessons will follow them into adulthood and will help them understand why we need to look after our endangered planet.

Amendment to approved structures

Children currently spend most of their days outdoors at nursery and can choose to use the summerhouse whenever they wish. The summerhouse is heated which allows them to warm up and get dry during the winter months. We originally erected a canvas bell tent onsite to create a second sheltered space. Sadly, this tent did not survive the winter and has had to be removed from site. We propose to erect a wooden gazebo-type structure – named “Picnic Shelter” on the plans - in its place, to allow them another space to escape extreme weathers. We plan to house resources such as paints, pens and paper within this structure alongside picnic tables for the children to work. The design of this structure will be in keeping with the rest of the nursery site and RSPB reserve beyond.

We have replaced the “canopy” over the kitchen area with a wood and felt roof fixed to the breezeblock kitchen. Again, this is a longer-lasting solution where the canopy started to fail. This structure does not obstruct any views or affect neighbours or the general public in any way. It is tastefully made and is in keeping with the natural look of the site. We would like formal permission for this to remain onsite.

Appraisal of relevant planning issues

Nature conservation: the enclosed letter from the RSPB confirms that the land is of low intrinsic value for nature. The proposed use is entirely self-contained and will have no off-site impacts on the nearby Combes Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest. There are no features on site liable to hold specially protected species. No trees are proposed to be removed.

Landscape and visual impacts: the replacement structures proposed to be located on the site are all small scale and will scarcely be visible beyond the boundaries of the site itself, they will blend in with the environment more so than the original approved structures. Because of screening trees and drystone walls, no element of the proposal will be visible from the only residential property in the immediate area, Ballfields Barn, located on the west side of Apesford Lane approximately 60m away.

Access statement

The proposed use will continue to be served by the existing RSPB car park and visitor trail, which provides level access onto the site suitable for people of all levels of mobility. As with any childcare facility, access to the site itself during operational hours is restricted to authorised childcare providers, children, and their carers.

No public rights of way are affected.

Appendix 1 - photographs of the site as existing, June 2021

Summer house



Toilet shed



Kitchen with wood and felt roof



Proposed location of "Picnic Shelter"

