

Pastures Centre, Davies Lane, Leytonstone

Background

The site consists of two buildings, the Good Sheppard building, and the Pastures building. The Good Shepherd building remained vacant and underutilised for some time and the Pastures building was closed for a period of time due to Covid restrictions. The Council has successfully brought them back into occupation, with two differing uses adding much needed diversity to the local community in following this approach.

The Good Shepherd Building was leased to Good Shepherd Studios (GSS), from August 2022, based on an operating much needed facilities to the community. In doing so and as part of the commercial arrangements put into place, the Council agreed to fund the installation of a pathway and a new pedestrian access gate at the northern end of the site onto Davies Lane. This gate will enable all public access to the café from the rear and will provide an improved means of emergency escape for wheelchair users, and those requiring such egress routes. We are currently seeking planning permission for the installation of the new gate.

The Pastures is an operational Council building and is managed by Sports and Leisure. The Council offers space to a wide range of groups, including

- Snaresbrook Arts Project – adult learning
- Little Soccer Stars
- Leytonstone Youth FC U12
- Somali Banaadir Youth
- All Star FC
- Monday Social Group
- SideOut Volleyball
- Leyton Youth Badminton Club
- Youth Hubs Project
- General Area Youth Hubs Project

There are several reasons Sports and Leisure would like the perimeter of the Pastures site secured:

- To stop litter and waste left by members of the public

- Potential ASB issues if the Pastures site was open to the public when staff are not on site / and potentially when staff are on site as staff don't monitor the external area.
- Management and security of the Pastures site when staff are not on site
- Safeguarding concerns raised by users of the Pastures site and Sports and Leisure
- To address any lone working concerns.

The Pastures site have vulnerable people coming along that pathway who may have behavioural issues should they be approached by persons unknown to them.

Due to the nature of the activities at Pastures Youth Centre it would be industry standard to provide a safe & secure facility for all users. By having the fence separating the two facilities this allows there to be a clear boundary and accountability.

Planning

The planning application is just for the gate and associated landscaping and hardstanding, the planning assessment is urban design, impact on neighbours and trees/local biodiversity. All of which were found to be acceptable.

There isn't a need to justify the gate in terms of safeguarding, as the gate doesn't cause any harm.

The motion to defer to allow time to engage and consult with the community was carried;

Since the planning meeting Sports and Leisure have engaged with all 23 user groups and staff that work on site.

Some of the responses included

- I think the gates should be kept shut, when members come they can ring the intercom and caretaker will let them in. For security the gates should be kept shut.
Thanks
- I'm very keen for more people to enjoy the Pastures, it's a great local facility and not enough people know about it. As long as staffing & security for the building can be guaranteed it would be lovely for the garden area to be open.
- we are happy with the large outer gate onto the pavement being unlocked for the youth hub, having that closed would not be conducive to a 'drop in' youth hub and would be a barrier for young people
- Personally we prefer the gate to be closed as then we know that not everybody and anybody can walk into Pastures.

Pastures Action Group (PAG)

Sports and Leisure engaged with PAG who have described themselves as a sub group of the Pastures Steering Group.

The Pastures Action Group feels the planning permission "is concrete proof that council officers are not being transparent and are acting in a covert manner to enable the redevelopment of the site in the next few years".

PAG have said they have talked to users of the site and there are no safeguarding issues but have not mentioned the overall management of the site.

PAG are adamant that they want the site left open with unrestricted access 24/7 to anybody that wants to enter the site

PAG are adamant that no community engagement has taken place and don't accept that when officers contacted all the user groups and contacted PAG directly that this constituted engagement or consultation.

Conclusion

Following the consultation there are mixed responses from the user groups on whether the Pastures site should be a secured site or left open. The site is not a park or designated open space but is a facility for community groups to use. Community groups can book the facility and have good access.

The gardening group have a key to one of the gates so can access the garden area freely without the need to leave the site unsecured.

The Pastures Action Group are adamant that they want the site left open with unrestricted access 24/7 to anybody that wants to enter the site. They are not considering the management difficulties of an open site, or the fact that community groups can access a secured site. The PAG feel the Council is only insisting that the site should be secured so the Council can redevelop the site in the future, even though officers have advised the PAG this is not the case.

Historically the site has always been a secured site and Sports and Leisure have concluded that this should continue going forward.