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Caversham
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RG4 7DT

Councillor Deborah Edwards,
Chairman of The Heights Free School Sub-Committee,
Reading Borough Council,
Civic Offices,
Bridge Street,
Reading
RG1 2LU

29th September 2016

Dear Councillor Edwards,

I am writing to assure that you are aware that there is a proposal for Mapledurham Playing Fields (Fit4All) being finalised by the Mapledurham Playing Fields Foundation, a registered charity, which is an alternative to the proposal submitted by the Education Funding Agency. I request that you defer any decision on variations to the "Recreation Ground Charity" scheme until this can be finalised and presented to The Heights subcommittee. This will be no later than by the end of this year.

I attach a leaflet outlining Fit4All. In summary it proposes that Mapledurham Playing Fields Foundation undertake the enhancement, management and operation of Playing Fields with a lease for 25 years. In contrast to the EFA's proposal, Fit4All is not a one-time fix which will eventually be exhausted, but a transformation to re-establish the financial viability and enhance the vitality of the Recreation Ground Charity.

We believe the proposal will be very interesting to Reading Borough Council as it resolves an immediate critical problem, the restoration of Mapledurham Pavilion, relieves it of a chronic problem, the upkeep of Mapledurham Playing Fields, and absolves Reading Borough Council of an open ended financial liability in return for a modest contribution. Furthermore Fit4All is in accordance with best practice identified by research conducted by the Charity Commission. In its advice on "Village Halls and Community Centres" the Charity Commission states "As a general rule, active, vibrant governance and an active vibrant village hall go hand in hand. Our research revealed a clearly identifiable link between the ability of village hall and community centre charities to attract users, their ability to attract trustees and other volunteers, and their ability to generate funding". Mapledurham Playing Fields Foundation has already 9 designated trustees and over 70 registered volunteers.

To ensure that the anticipated proposal from the Education Funding Agency was not compromised, development at Mapledurham Playing Fields was suspended for almost two years. In particular the plans for restoration of the pavilion were halted and the long term security of tenure, required by Caversham Trents Football Club to secure grants and loans, was withheld. It would not seem unreasonable to grant us the relatively modest consideration of deferring any decision on variations to the scheme for a maximum of a further three months.

I am mindful that the Education Funding Agency set an arbitrary 4 month period of validity on its offer, which expires on 14th October. However I am advised that Reading Borough Council stated, at the Heights Free School subcommittee meeting on 12th July, that it would not be bound by this and would take as long to consider the proposal as necessary.

I should be grateful if you could confirm that Reading Borough Council will defer any decision on variations to the "Recreation Ground Charity" scheme until the Fit4All can be finalised and presented to The Heights Free School subcommittee, at the latest by the end of this year.

Yours sincerely,

Gordon Watt

Chairman of the Mapledurham Playing Fields Foundation

P.S. I am sending a copy of the letter to the Charity Commission which has encouraged us to submit our proposal to you.

cc. John Lewis, Charity Commission, Permissions and Compliance Team

P.P.S. I am also sending copies to organisations which have asked to be kept informed of the progress of the Fit4All proposal:

cc. Mark Pover, Head of Investment and Facilities, Football Association
Liz Pill, County Development Manager, Berks-Bucks Football Association
Vicky Aston, Planning Manager, Sports England
David Sharman, Development Manager, Fields in Trust
Nicole O'Donnell, Community Development Officer, Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association