

Supporting statement for the development of Kent Rooms, Church House into a counselling centre: Caversham Counselling Centre

Proposal

To establish a counselling centre, Caversham Counselling Centre, comprising of two consulting rooms and a waiting room in the Kent Rooms of Church House, 59 Church St Caversham RG4 8AX. Previously, these rooms were used as offices by Thames Valley Police from 2005-2018.

The centre will offer counselling and psychotherapy for children and adults living in Caversham, Reading and the surrounding area (Local Development Framework (2008): 2.26: improving health and care in local communities.)

There is no other similar centre for professional counsellors offering this service in the North of Reading. Qualified, experienced, self-employed therapists will have a licence (under the terms of the lease) to rent space in the rooms offering talking therapies to support the emotional wellbeing of people in the local community. Individual therapists will set their fees; Caversham Counselling Centre is not offering free counselling unlike some charities and the NHS Talking Therapies. However, the centre will compliment NHS services with therapists able to offer longer-term therapy where needed.

Therapists will see children and adults for one-to-one counselling. It will also offer therapy for couples and family groups. At any given time, either one or two therapists will be working in the centre seeing one or two or a small number of clients. There will not be a large increase in the number of people using the building causing disruption to other activities taking place in Church House.

The centre will have a particular focus on providing counselling for young people age 10-25 years. There is a need nationwide and within Reading for emotional health and wellbeing services for young people and as the minutes of the Reading Health and Wellbeing Board 19.1.18, stated, the demand and complexity of need is increasing. Therapists working at the centre will have additional specialist training to meet the needs of this age group providing early interventions and support promoting good mental health and resilience in young people. The centre will have close links with the charity No5 Young People Oxford Road Reading which offers free counselling for this age group. The Caversham Counselling Centre is not a charity, but a business. However, it

is hoped when it has become established, there will be money available to subsidise therapists enabling them to offer a reduced rate to younger clients.

The centre also aims to provide a pleasant, discreet, safe work environment for counsellors and psychotherapists who often have difficulty finding suitable rooms where they can practise their profession. It is hoped the centre will become a community for therapists in the area offering support and opportunities for continuing professional development. It is envisaged that small group seminars, training events and reading groups will be held in the waiting room on Saturdays throughout the year.

The rooms

Some refurbishment of the rooms is needed to make them attractive putting clients at ease. Confidentiality is key and in order to ensure this, insulated and sound-proofed stud walls covering unsightly hessian boards will be erected. No planning permission is needed for these small-scale improvements. No building work will be carried out to the exterior of the building. The consulting rooms will be furnished with comfortable chairs where the therapist and client will be able to talk and listen in a safe, confidential setting.

No medical treatments or procedures will be carried out in the centre and medical practitioners will not be working there as that is not the nature of the services being offered. No drugs will be stored or dispensed on the premises as the therapy practised is known as a 'talking therapy' carried out by counsellors and psychotherapists. Talking therapies are recognised by the National Institute of Care Excellence (NICE) as being effective therapies for people with emotional difficulties (2005, 2017.) No confidential data will be stored on the premises.

Church House is accessible to people with disabilities and refurbishments to the Kent rooms will include widening the doorway into the room at the rear making it accessible to wheelchair users. A designated parking space for blue-badge holders is already available at the rear of the site (Local Development Framework 4.26: social inclusion.)

All clients and therapists will have access to a fully accessible toilet on the ground floor of Church House. Therapists will also have access to a kitchenette. One dedicated parking space for therapists is available at the rear of the site.

The availability of a waiting room is one reason the Kent rooms are suitable for a counselling service for children and young people. This will give parents a sense of security knowing they can wait in the building for their child whilst the therapy is taking place.

Location

Church House is situated in the centre of Caversham, but the counselling centre will have a discreet presence. This is desirable and appropriate as clients value anonymity and security. A small sign at the side of the front entrance to Church House will indicate the centre's presence and another sign will indicate the internal entrance into the waiting room. Church House is used by members of the public for a variety of activities and services. A local cleaning company and the charity Sport in Mind lease office space in the building.

Church House is on main bus routes from the centre of Reading, Lower Caversham, Caversham Heights and the surrounding area. Christchurch Bridge reduces the walking and cycling distance from Reading Station and the centre of town. There is also 1.5 hours free parking at Waitrose, adjacent to Church House. It is hoped the availability of public transport will encourage service users and therapists to reduce vehicular usage (Local Development Framework 4.26.)

Being served by buses and in a central, well lit location it is hoped that service users will feel confident coming to the centre when it is dark and in the evenings. The core opening hours will be Monday to Friday 8am-8pm with some therapists working earlier from 7am or finishing later at 9pm. The centre will also be open on Saturday mornings 8-1pm for therapy sessions as well as for small group seminars and workshops for therapists.

I see this counselling centre as enhancing the development of Caversham in a sustainable way (Local Development Framework 2.4.) The counselling centre will not detract from businesses, services or facilities in the area, but on the contrary will be a welcome addition to Caversham as it offers a much-needed service and will bring in new people who may then avail themselves of other local amenities, shops and cafes.

The aim is to provide a place where local therapists can work and where local people can receive a service enhancing their emotional health and wellbeing (Local Development Framework 10: Community Facilities.) The centre will work closely with other organisations offering similar or complementary

services such as Sport in Mind, No5 Young People, local GP surgeries and schools.

About Me

I am a qualified, experienced counsellor and registered, accredited member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) having gained distinction in the Post Graduate Diploma in Counselling at Reading University in 2012. I am self-employed and my business is called Jo Hopkins Counselling. If I gain a Lawful Development Certificate, I will lease the Kent Rooms in Church House from its owners, the diocese of Oxford, overseen by the parish of Caversham, Thameside and Mapledurham. The parish PCC has given its approval in principle for the Kent rooms to be leased to me for 7 years for the purpose of establishing a counselling centre.