

Background

We moved into our home at 40 Links Avenue on the 30th July 2010 with our three boys we had at the time. Our youngest son Noah has cerebral palsy, right sided hemiplegia and has limited to no mobility on his right side. At the time he was unable to walk and talk and the doctors were unsure if he would ever do so. Over the next few years our second son Milo was also diagnosed as Autistic and we were delighted to have a fourth son in 2012. Our boys are now 11,10,7 and 3. Noah can now walk, he has rest days regularly from school to regain his energy. He had operations on his legs and arm last year to try to improve his walking and pain levels, he is due another operation on both his legs and arm in a few months.

A couple of years ago we realised that we need a more appropriate living space for our family. We didn't have enough bedrooms and because of the boys special needs, Noah and Milo needed bedrooms and facilities on the ground floor. Because of the layout of our home and its position on the land it seemed difficult to modify our house to suit our family's needs, particularly as we have no rear garden, only a small courtyard, and our garden is all at the front of the property. The small courtyard space to the rear of the house has a hot tub to undertake regular hydrotherapy sessions.

With limited space, we therefore put the house on the market with a view to sell and move to a home with a more suitable layout. After a year, it became apparent that we could not find a suitable alternative that we liked for a price we could afford, so we took the decision to modify our existing house to try to provide the facilities we wanted for all our children. What we needed were:

- To provide 2 additional bedrooms downstairs for the 2 boys with special needs.
- To provide downstairs toilet and washing facilities
- To make the ground floor one level for Noah, previously it had 3 different step up and down floor levels.
- To move and increase the size of the kitchen to cope with the needs of a family of 6.
- To increase the living space and dining areas again to cope with a larger family and equipment needed for special needs, such as standing frames and specialist seating.
- To make the whole of the downstairs space accessible by wheelchair for Noah.
- To make as much of the external garden space accessible by wheelchair for Noah, as he couldn't use the outside space at all.
- Provide suitable wheelchair access to the property.

To achieve all this, we drew up a layout to meet our needs and applied for planning permission to construct a sizeable extension to the side of our home. The planning application was approved and we constructed the extension as planned. Most of the internal doors and frames have been removed to ease circulation around the inside of the house for Noah. Noah also has hemianopia, which means he cannot see out of the right sides of both of his eyes. Wide walkways are needed to prevent him from walking into edges and falling over things. The old cottage style multi-level ground floor was also made into one level. The new front wall of the extension consists almost entirely of a set of bi-fold doors which allow easy wheelchair access for Noah. These are level with the raised deck outside for Noah to access the garden independently and a ramp for access onto the deck from the garden into the property, as our garden is at the front.

Our children can now play safely in the garden and we have given them suitable/accessible facilities for them to enjoy in the garden. The garden is at the front of the property and has an existing child's wooden play house that is nominally 2.5 m high and a wooden shed/cabin that have been there for over 3 years. It contains family items such as toys, tools, the boy's scooters and DIY materials that we have no room for in the house. It also houses our rabbits and guinea pigs during the night as there are many foxes in our area. We also use the smaller shed as a sensory hut for Noah.

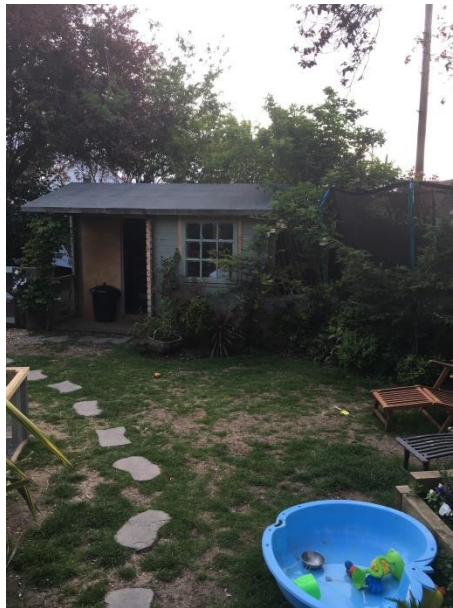
All of the structural and layout changes made to the property have been made for the sole purpose of providing tailor-made accommodation/access for our own family to enjoy.

At the point of completing the extension works we realised that we had an opportunity to assist other families who have experienced similar issues to ourselves with children who have special needs. As a family we struggle to go out to places suitable for all of our children and somewhere we can relax as parents. We often don't go out at all. It's incredibly hard to find an environment which is non-judgmental, safe and understanding of our children's behaviour/needs. We therefore thought it would be lovely to open up our home and share our new space with other families, and create a friendly and caring Open House. A place where other families can come and visit and not be judged. We are designed to be small and feel like going to a friend's house. It is only run by Samantha so large groups are just are not manageable and go against our idea of a small home from home environment. We have also closed to other families when we have a family in that need some space on their own too.

You asked the following questions

1. Please explain how land at Olive Tree Cottage is being used in connection with the notices displayed on the boundary of the property – that is, who is visiting the property and at what times? Please describe the numbers of persons visiting on a daily basis, the date from which the land has been open for use in this way, and the types of activities undertaken and facilities provided.
 - a. *All signs apart from our house name sign have been moved to an internal position. We opened on the 21st April. We have days when no-one comes in. No additional facilities are provided for the visitors beyond those installed for our own family use. We offer tea, coffee, homemade cake etc. The children can make use of the facilities we have provided for our own children eg; safe enclosed garden, Ramp access for wheelchairs, playhouse, toys, access to the animals (ducks, rabbits, Guinea pigs and our family therapy dog Rosie and therapy cats). We have some days when no-one comes in and others around 15 currently.*
2. Please state what external changes have been made to accommodate visitors.
 - a. *Everything is for the benefit of our own family, which people can share.*
3. Have any raised platforms/decks (over 30cm from ground level) been erected in the gardens to facilitate use by visitors? If so please provide details supported by photographs to show where these are located. If appropriate, please state any planning permissions granted for such platforms.

- a. *All of the decking that has been installed is less than 30 cm high and for the use of our own family to create an internal and external space that is wheelchair accessible and of level ground. Our son Noah, who uses a wheelchair(he can also walk on good days) falls easily on uneven ground. The decking provides a safe level surface and less dangerous when he falls. The ramp to the decking on the front drive gives wheelchair access to the deck and so to the property.*
4. Have any sheds, arbours or other types of development been constructed in the gardens of the property in the last 4 years? If so, please state what these are and where they are located, providing details of their height. It would be helpful if photographs could be supplied.
- a. *We installed approx. 3 years ago, a play/sensory hut for the children and a shed/cabin for our garden tools/rabbits etc. Both are installed within our front garden as we do not have either a side or rear garden. The arbours on our front deck are both designed to support the fences, and to allow us to enjoy the use of our garden with planting, design etc. Again our garden is at the front so this is why they are at the front of our property. The fences in this area are regularly blown down by the winds coming off the sea. We replaced the fence to the left of our property recently, which actually belongs to our neighbour, but sadly he would not replace it. It was in such a bad state of repair it was letting the children and animals out so we had no choice but to replace it ourselves, so we have made sure as best we can it will not blow over again.*



5. In order to assist my enquiry it would be helpful if you could provide a photograph of the dwelling elevation facing Links Avenue to help me to ascertain the 'principal' elevation of the property for planning purposes.



6. I understand from the notice placed on your boundary fence that duck eggs are sold from the property. Please describe the extent of such sales. How many callers do you estimate attend weekly in connection with these sales?
- a. *We have 7 ducks and get on average 4 eggs per day. Most of the eggs are used in our home baking so we rarely have any left over. We might sell half a dozen per week rarely.*



I hope that covers everything but please do ask if there is anything else you need.

Robert and Samantha Staniforth