

Work starts on Surrey's respite centre for autistic people

17 March 2024



Families set to benefit from new short breaks accommodation being built in Woking helped mark the official start of work at a milestone groundbreaking ceremony.

The purpose-built £5.7m facility will enable autistic people and those with learning disabilities to enjoy new experiences while their families take a break from caring. It's part of Surrey County Council's drive to create the right homes with the right support for people who need it and represents a major investment in specialist accommodation to help people achieve greater independence.

Enjoying some early spring sunshine, families were joined at the site in Goldsworth Park by representatives from the county council as well as architects AtkinsRealis and contractors Neilcott Construction. Also marking the occasion were Woking MP Jonathan Lord and representatives from Woking Borough Council and local community organisations.

The new accommodation on the site of the old Lakers Youth Centre will provide eight ensuite bedrooms as well as a sensory room, a communal lounge / dining room and landscaped gardens. It will provide the first such service in this part of the county and will ultimately add almost 2,500 nights of additional short breaks capacity per year for adults with additional and complex needs.

Guests will be able to enjoy new opportunities, make friends, gain new skills and connect with their communities during short stays without their family carers, who will be able to take some time away from their caring responsibilities to focus on their own wellbeing.

The event on March 14 marked the first 'spade in the ground' for an ambitious county council strategy which aims to deliver more than 1,400 units of specialist accommodation for adults with support needs across Surrey, including the redevelopment of another short breaks site in Banstead. Supported independent living accommodation for those with learning difficulties and mental health needs is also part of the plan, as well as extra care housing for older residents which will have support workers on hand if needed.

Sinead Mooney, Surrey County Council cabinet member for Adult Social Care, said: *"Unpaid carers across Surrey do an amazing job in ensuring that their loved ones can continue to live in their own homes, but it can take a toll on even the most dedicated partner or relative. The new accommodation will represent a state-of-the-art facility designed to provide the person being cared for with the support they need, while offering their carer the chance to recharge their batteries by taking a break themselves."*

"We're delighted to have broken ground and eagerly await the opening of the new accommodation next year. We want our residents to be able to live their best lives and our ambitious building programme to provide the right homes with the right support will help us achieve that."

Natalie Bramhall, cabinet member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure said; *"We're pleased to have broken ground on the site in Goldsworth Park. The site of this new short breaks service is one of many projects being delivered by our Land & Property Capital Programme team in partnership with Adult Social Care to help people stay independent, safe and well so they can live the lives they want."*

The star of the day was Jodie, a potential future user of the centre who currently visits the council's short breaks service in Banstead.

After watching an architectural 'flythrough' video of the new accommodation alongside assembled guests, **Jodie's mum Jean**, voiced her approval: *"The one thing you want from a respite centre is to know that your children - young adults - are secure, safe & happy."* She further explained: *"Having respite breaks is absolutely a 'must' for parents and to have a facility that's been purpose built... is totally invaluable."*

Andrea, mum to Brandan, who also currently attends the service in Banstead, added: *"Brandan needs 24-hour care seven days a week - it does not stop for us as parents - and this will be an invaluable service so near to our home. But it's not only for us, it's about Brandan. We want him to feel it's like a holiday. We can be happy and relaxed knowing that he is happy."*

Image: (left to right) Jonathan Lord MP, Jodie, Jodie's Mum Jean, and Cllr Sinead Mooney