

The Inverness Courier

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Communities continue virus fight

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Family time activities and puzzles

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Keeping everyone informed

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Planning permission is granted for pioneering new unit

Haven Centre plans clear crucial hurdle



By Valerie Sweeney
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A BOLD vision to develop a pioneering centre in Inverness for children and young people with multiple and complex needs has taken a major step forward with the granting of planning permission.

The proposed Haven Centre - a first for Scotland - will feature respite flats, a specialist play centre, community coffee shop and garden and will be built on a derelict site in Murray Road, Smithton.

There will also be supported housing constructed by Highland Council at the site.

Those spearheading the Haven Appeal, which was launched by the Elsie Normington Foundation, said it was a significant milestone and also revealed it has been able to revise its fundraising target from £4 million to £3.5 million. So far, £1.2 million has been raised.



Foundation chairwoman Elsie Normington described it as wonderful news and said the charity was more determined than ever to push on and reach its goal.

"We are delighted that after the official launch of our plans in February 2017, the planning department has now given its full permission for this important site development," she said.

"Our charity is now in a stronger position as we progress forward to see our plans become a reality."



TURN TO PAGE 3

Elsie Normington at the site in Smithton. Inset, a computer-generated image of the new centre.

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Knitting grandmother thanks Courier readers for donating bags of wool

'It might save my sanity during the lockdown!'

By Ian Duncan

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KIND-HEARTED Inverness residents have donated wool so that a knitting grandmother can continue making clothes to keep premature babies warm.

Marie MacIver, an 81-year-old former nurse, put out an appeal for donations in the Courier last month, and they quickly flooded in.

At least seven bags full of wool of all different colours arrived and Mrs MacIver, of Esk Road in Hilton, contacted the Courier again to say thanks to everyone for their generosity.

"Oh my goodness - it might save

Gran's big appeal to help tiny newborns



How we reported the appeal last month.

my sanity during the coronavirus lockdown," she said.

"This will give me something to do for the next wee while. The response has been marvellous.

"It should keep me going until the end of June, when I will be 82."

Mrs MacIver knits hats, cardigans and blankets for premature babies who are cared for at the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Glasgow. Every month for the past year-and-a-half she has sent a box filled with eight jackets, eight hats and a knitted blanket to the maternity unit.

However, she appealed for donations of double knitting wool as her monthly good deed was proving quite costly, both in terms of yarn and postage.

She said: "I'll use anything, but

KindNess

I like the double knitting wool because it is cosier for the babies."

Because the tots are so tiny, she uses patterns for making dolls' clothes.

Mrs MacIver, who learned to knit at her mother's knee when she was very young, produces jackets in three different sizes starting at very tiny, and gradually getting bigger.

Her own daughter, Ashley who is now 41, was born prematurely after a car accident.

She also another daughter, Sylvia (54), and a son, 56-year-old Ray, five granddaughters and three grandsons.

“

This will give me something to do for the next wee while. The response has been marvellous.

Marie MacIver

And, after she sends her monthly parcel she receives a thank you letter from the hospital addressed to Granny Marie.

Centre wins planning permission

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The next step is for the charity to buy the site - previously occupied by the former Culloiden Court Nursing Home which was destroyed by fire in 2010 - from the council in the near future.

Mrs Normington said the coronavirus restrictions had highlighted the isolation experienced by families with children with complex needs, and how desperately needed the Haven Centre is.

"During this time of isolation due to the pandemic, we know that many people are struggling right now," she said.

"However, we are also aware of the many families with disabled children and complex needs whose isolation is hugely augmented

during a time like this - where they have to care 24/7, putting a massive pressure upon these families who we want to serve and provide the facilities they so deserve.

"The isolation is 100 times more desperate for parents of children with special needs."

Mrs Normington, who held an online meeting with other appeal members this week, said they were determined to push onward despite the current difficulties.

"This is a time for innovation and we are looking for virtual fundraising ideas to keep the money flowing in towards this much-needed project," she said, and invited more members of the public to get involved.

"We are progressing. We are moving forward.

"We are not standing still."

Appeal co-ordinator Martin Baldwin said the project had managed to revise its target as it would not need to pay VAT on some elements of the new development.

He also said the granting of planning permission would trigger access to potential funding.

"Although we are aware of the challenge, the fact we have planning permission and can buy the land adds more motivation," he said.

"The impact of the coronavirus is challenging, but I hope we can navigate through it and see the fulfilment of this.

"We are very aware most of the people who would be using this centre are the ones who are isolated anyway."



The foundation now needs to buy land in Murray Road which it has earmarked for the centre.

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