

Wildwooders
<https://www.wildwooders.uk>

29th December 2020.

Ms. Fairweather
Members' Room
P O Box 270
Guildhall
London
EC2P 2EJ

Dear Ms. Fairweather and Mr. Warnock,

My name is Olivia White, I am ten years old and I am in Year 5 at St Christopher's School.

I hope you are doing well despite going into yet another lockdown. It has not been easy for any of us. However, I have been lucky enough to have spent both of the whole lockdowns in the forest and outside as I live in front of the Hampstead Heath Extension in north London.

My brother Elliot and I have been trying to use the playground in the Extension, but it is almost an impossible task as it is only for kids under the age of 4. Bear in mind that my brother is 3 and he does not fit inside the 2 baby swings available and he can only slide for a millisecond on the rusty old slide. The playground also offers a small climbing frame with splinters all around the edges and a walking beam that is slanted on a small hill. When that is wet, you can fall very easily, we all did. This is the recount of my daily experience at my local playground.

Over the summer, I realised that maybe there was something I could do to improve this playground, so I decided to start my initiative 'Pick for Parks'. I first picked the berries from the Hampstead Heath Extension and then I made them into jam so that I could raise more funds for the play area in the Extension because it is not in good shape. I recycled spice jars from my neighbours and tried 6 different jam recipes before I finally got the right one. Then, I created a website: wildwooder.uk all by myself, I flyered around my neighbourhood to create awareness for my initiative and managed to sell 101 jars of jam and raised a bit more than £1000 through donations and the jams.

My neighbours have been very supportive, and it has given me the confidence to go forward. My local MP Mike Freer has also been very supportive, sharing my initiative with the wider community, speaking to the media and also donating to Wildwooders. I have also been approached by the Barnet Council and through Bob Warnock, the Superintendent of Hampstead Heath, I have been in touch with so many people who take care of the Heath and are involved in great projects to improve, promote and preserve it.

My local playground is in a great location and is surrounded by trees and birds, but unfortunately the large space it offers is not wisely used nor does it have adequate access.

Small and older children find it very hard to get into it because there is a big mud bath right in front of the entrance, not to mention disabled children who cannot get anywhere near the play area or even on the paths.

Additionally, this playground does not offer any interactions between children of all ages nor between parents and their kids. These areas are supposed to create inclusive play opportunities for all, but parents can't get involved at all. The equipment is old and not adequate for the needs of children of any age, which include both challenging and achievable activities for the little ones. But currently, we just don't have any choice!

I envision a playground that maximises its resources and is child-centred offering opportunities to be creative and imaginative but also supporting equipment for children from 2 to 12 years olds of mixed abilities to really enhance children's physical and mental health. There is enough space to have areas for different ages, ability and interaction while keeping the area safe and still preserving its natural look.

This playground is located in an area that used to be farmland and it would be great to bring back history through a farm themed playground that could include wooden notice boards telling the story of this area and the community.

I am currently working to generate more support from the local community to help raise more money to make my initiative a reality in a partnership with The City of London Corporation. I need your help especially during these difficult times where the playground is the only place where us kids can feel free. It is our right as children to have open spaces that help our physical and mental wellbeing and there has never been a greater need for this than now.

Yours sincerely,

Olivia White
Wildwooder