

# WALDEN Local

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## 'GIBSON HOUSE SCHOOL' PLAN TO PROTECT FRIENDS' SITE FROM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

A LOCAL PROFESSIONAL management team has a business plan for a progressive independent school on the former Friends' School/Walden School site that would protect it from housing development and allow greater community access to the facilities.

The new school will be named Gibson House School in acknowledgement of George Stacey Gibson, the original Quaker benefactor who established the former Friends' School on this site.

The vision for the school is: 'To build a unique school with the whole, rounded development of the child at its heart.'

### MUSIC AND ARTS

Alongside the traditional subjects there will be a number of co-curricular themes running throughout the school, including business and entrepreneurship, music and the arts, outdoors and forest school, mindfulness and sports.

This progressive school will open in September



The school's Edwardian Swimming pool.

2018 as a nursery and prep school for ages 1-13 and expand to open Gibson International College in September 2019 for ages 14-18 and will include boarding facilities.

The management group has identified a head

teacher, formed a curriculum and is currently securing funding – being careful to select the right investors who will match the ethos of the school and benefit the town.

The group will then submit their bid to the administrators of the school.

### FOREFRONT

Neil Roskilly, Chief Executive of the Independent Schools Association that represents the interests of 439 top private schools, said that he is 'delighted to see the exciting plans for a high-quality and progressive independent school for Saffron Walden.

'The town has a wonderful reputation for being at the forefront of private education, so it's pleasing to see how the new school intends to offer a true choice for families as well as a first-rate education focusing on the needs of each individual child.'

TURN TO PAGE 4

## 4 WALDEN LOCAL Wednesday October 11 2017

FROM PAGE 4

The group, being formed by locals, is firmly against further housing development on the site and is fully supportive of the listing application that is under way to protect the main Victorian building and Edwardian swimming pool.

The Department for Education confirmed in July that it did not want the site.

### STRONG FOCUS

The school will have a strong focus on giving the Saffron Walden community much greater access to the facilities for sporting clubs, adult education classes, a cookery school, weddings and other events.

Saffron Walden MP Kemi Badenoch has welcomed the announcement: "I'm very pleased to support the Gibson House School bid.

"In particular, I'd like to pay tribute to the dedication and perseverance of all those working behind the scenes to ensure that the Walden School site continues to be used for education.

"I know how much they've done to get this far and will continue to do all I can to assist.

"I received so many letters from constituents worried about the future of the Walden School which has been a great asset to our community for so long.

"This is another opportunity for me to reassure them that every possible option that benefits our young people is being explored.

"While the name might be different, I have no doubt that the Quaker ethos of the school will continue.

"My congratulations and thanks go to everyone involved in this project; I look forward to seeing all their hard work come to fruition next year."

### SUPPORT

The proposals have also drawn support from local Quakers. Sheila Brignall, who attends the Quaker Meeting House in Saffron Walden, said: "Those of us from the local Quaker community who have had contact with the School over many years are pleased to learn of plans for Gibson House School and wish them well"

The Gibson House School management team can be contacted at [info@thegibsonschool.com](mailto:info@thegibsonschool.com)

• George Stacey Gibson is the subject of the recent 'Mr Saffron Walden' video which can be seen at <https://vimeo.com/178157875>