

Bromham Mill is "perfect introduction" for Mencap's new chief executive

Bromham Mill in Bedfordshire was the location of one of the first visits for Mencap's new chief executive Mark Goldring – and one of the last for the outgoing chief executive Dame Jo Williams.

As part of the visit, a discussion took place around the innovative and sustainable plans for the future of Bromham Mill, which included members of Bedford Mencap – an independent charity affiliated to the national Mencap charity; Cllr Apu Bagchi, President of Bedford Mencap and cabinet member at Bedford Borough Council; a representative of Bedfordshire County Council; directors of The Bromham Millers CIC Ltd, and Tim Branson, a member of the East Regional Committee for Mencap, who has a learning disability and works at Beds Garden Carers.

The group heard about the project, which will be developed in stages. The first phase includes the introduction of organic flour milling, an education centre to act as a community resource, and an improved café. One aim is to enhance the Mill to the benefit of the community. Another, to create training and employment for people with a learning disability in the area, fewer than 10% of whom have a job.

The Mill and the grounds will still be a place for quiet enjoyment, where people can walk by themselves or with their dogs. The project will be sympathetic to the local wildlife - bats, badgers and owls can all be found on the site and will be protected. Also, the Mill, the Barns and the Mill House will look just the same to visitors who enter Bromham Mill from Bridge End or Village Road.

With guidance from local conservation officers and the Civic Trust, the plan is to refurbish the Mill and the two Barns (listed buildings), and the Mill House. To improve access to the site, the Back Barn will be rebuilt at an angle, and steps will be taken to minimise flood risks. A new building, in keeping with the heritage, will replace the old workshop. The Mill will have a glass-fronted area by the mill pond for a café, and the Mill House will have its own conservatory at the back.

Ultimately it is hoped a restaurant, mosaic workshop and improved educational resource centre will be created, using the existing buildings. Planning permission is currently being applied for.

Mark Goldring, Mencap's chief executive-designate, said:

"This is the perfect example of the work of Mencap: a centre that should engage with the local community while creating employment and training opportunities for people with a learning disability.

"I admire Bedford Mencap's ambition to restore the Mill as a centre of the local community - for people with and without a learning disability. I can't wait to see it come to fruition."

Dame Jo Williams, who is retiring as **chief executive of Mencap** in November, said:

"I visited this site when it was just an initial idea - but the plan is really coming together through hard work from Bedford Mencap and the Royal Mencap Society, The Bromham Millers' partners and the local authorities.

"I look forward to coming back in a few years and seeing the Mill back in action."

For more information, please contact

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