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15th February, 2010

Dear Sir/Madam,

REFURBISHMENT OF JOHN WHITEHEAD PARK - 2009

In 2008/09 a major redevelopment began to take place in John Whitehead Park in Billingham. The park had gained access to a capital fund and green space grant to improve the green areas and build a whole new children's play area. This was to significantly improve usage of the park for local residents.

The one feature that the park lacked was a coffee shop. At that time there was an existing premises within the park owned by the Council but leased by a private tenant who ran a late night pizza delivery establishment, which was not favoured by the local residents due to extreme opening times and other activity.

We decided to refurbish the premises and negotiate with Rocco, the pizza shop owner, that the café would be refurbished by the Council, Rocco would run this establishment but with Council rules, not as a pizza shop. He seemed keen. A few weeks into the negotiations we were horrified that whilst watching a BBC undercover documentary that highlighted the dangers of pizza shop takeaway food and hygiene measures, the park café had been visited by an undercover reporter who found high levels of E-coli in the food. Needless to say, although bad press is not good in any Council establishment, it gave us the ideal opportunity to allow Rocco to vacate the premises!

On my first few visits to Cappuccino's, as it was then known, I was shocked and disgusted at the state of the premises, particularly the amount of grease and dirt that had accumulated over the years he had been there. How on earth was I going to tackle this one!

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TO: WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I contacted Chris at Sigma Catering, gave him the brief and invited him to visit the premises to see if he could be inspired. I gathered from the initial look on his face that he was not prepared for the horror that faced him! (Rocco had stripped out the items he wanted and left the remaining mess in the middle of the room, along with gallons of grease and dirt, for us to deal with!). Once over the initial shock Chris immediately saw this as a huge challenge. Basically, to rip it out and start again. Chris came back on many occasions with builders, electricians and plumbers and set to work on the plans and drawings. The first hurdle we came across, once the place had been emptied (many skip loads of horrible rubbish!), it came to light following a survey that the premises contained asbestos, both in the floor and ceiling. A slight hiccup to say the least! This was dealt with, the drawing were completed by Chris and the team at Sigma, changed many times by me (Chris does have the patience of a saint!) and were finally agreed, the funding was in place and it was all systems go. The brief to Chris and his team was to manage the whole project and turn an awful establishment into a wonderful preparation kitchen and eating area. Therefore, adding to the visitors experience of John Whitehead Park.

Due to the amount of work involved we hoped for a June/July 2009 opening ready for the school summer holidays. I raised the orders, gave Chris his own set of keys and left him to it!

From the beginning of the project Chris kept me informed at all times of what was happening, be it the colour of paint, the style of light fittings or to change a major appliance. No stone was left unturned. I was astounded by their enthusiasm, motivation and professionalism throughout the whole time the Park Café was being developed. It gradually took shape and the transformation was truly amazing. The finished product far exceeded my expectations, as it did many other members and officers of the Council.

Chris and the team at Sigma met every target that was set and we actually opened the Park Café in May 2009. Both the design of the kitchen preparation area and the way it links with the dining area is both extremely practical and pleasing to the eye and is often complimented upon by members of the public who use the café.

This project was a huge undertaking and a bit of a nightmare for any supplier to take on board and we certainly made the right choice choosing Sigma as I am sure we got the best outcome possible. It is without hesitation I would recommend them for any award and praise them for their hard work, dedication, professionalism and positive approach throughout. I had a vision and Chris came up with the goods.

Kind regards,



ANITA BROWN
SERVICE MANAGER
CATERING & BUILDING CLEANING SERVICES