

Friends of Barnet Environment Centre : Chair's Report, September 2016

This has been a most exciting and eventful year! At the time of writing the last Annual Report, we were still using the old building, and construction of the new Centre was underway but delayed by the construction company going into liquidation. Fortunately Noah's Ark Children's Hospice (NACH) was able to find a replacement company, and construction was resumed. The new Centre was completed in late spring, and an Opening Ceremony held in early April. This was a wonderful occasion, as we were able to thank in person the staff of NACH and in particular the Hadley Trust, who had contributed so much towards the cost of the building. Behind the scenes, negotiations were taking place to agree a 'Licence to use' between ourselves and NACH, and once this was signed we moved into the Centre in mid-May. We are delighted to be able to now work from this base - school visitors have reported it is an excellent environment in which to deliver the classroom aspects of our educational programmes – SO different from the previous dilapidated buildings!

During the course of our negotiations, it became clear that we needed to change our charity status. We are now a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This required a Special General Meeting and the development of a revised constitution.

Thanks to the efforts of our volunteers, considerable improvements have been made to the reserve. A variety of glades have been constructed, a 'wiggly tree trail' delineated, the ponds improved, and a hibernaculum excavated. We were delighted to have the support of groups of young people from The Challenge in two of these projects.

Continuing to deliver our educational programmes in this ever-changing environment was very demanding, and the very wet early summer period didn't help, but Caroline Gellor, our Environmental Education Manager, rose to this challenge so well that this was our most successful year ever – 1594 children accompanied by 450 adults benefitted from visits, with highly encouraging feedback. We catered for 47 school visits and 9 youth groups as well as looking after 6 Work Experience students. It is clear that we are offering experiences highly valued by young people and their teachers and leaders, and we are looking forward, from our wonderful new base, to creating a wider variety of courses and attracting even more next year.

Obtaining sufficient funding is a challenge for any charity, but we have been very fortunate in having grants from the Hadley Trust and John Lyon's Charity, which enable us to contract with Caroline Gellor to lead on all our educational work. Together with funds raised from subscriptions, donations and our Quiz evening, we can be confident of our financial standing for the next two years.

We held a very successful Open Afternoon in July, as a result of which we recruited some enthusiastic volunteers with a range of useful skills. Given all the extra work involved in closing down the old building and setting ourselves up in the new, there has been even more work to do, but our team has met all the demands. Thanks are due to all who have helped us.

We are now looking forward to expanding our educational work, developing the reserve and working on the Centre Garden, based in our inspiring Centre.

Dick Elms

Chair of the Trustees