



**Friends of Barnet Environment Centre CIO**  
**Charity no. 1165515**

**Annual Report: September 2020 - August 2021**

The aim of the Friends of Barnet Environment Centre (FoBEC) is to advance the education of school age children and of the public in natural history and nature conservation, welcoming a wide diversity of visitors and enabling them to gain a positive attitude, lasting interest in and an appreciation of the natural environment. We also aim to maintain and develop the ecological and educational value of the Byng Road nature reserve in Barnet.

Our Environmental Education Manager, Caroline Gellor, resigned at the end of February for health reasons and she has now moved with her family to Wales. We held a very informal and socially distanced farewell event in mid-February, presenting her with a cheque from our members and with a photo album of her time at the Centre. FoBEC was very fortunate to obtain the services of Robyn Stern, an experienced Science teacher with a great interest in environmental education, to cover our bookings over the summer. Robyn did an excellent job and feedback from schools was extremely positive, so huge thanks to Robyn for stepping in. School and uniformed organisation bookings were good and we had over 500 children, plus their teachers and carers, visiting during the summer term. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped Robyn set up the classes and helped her clear up at the end of each teaching session.

We have bookings for school visits in the autumn term 2021 and we already have some for summer 2022. We were also asked by the London Borough of Barnet to provide some courses for children qualifying for free school meals, funded by the Government in an effort to help those young people catch up with their learning following COVID. Unfortunately, these courses did not happen this year but we are in discussion with LBB staff to organise them for next summer.

FoBEC also re-started events for the local community, running monthly Open Afternoons between May and August. The response has been steady, although we have not advertised widely and nor have we been able to run activities for children or provide tea and cakes as we have done in the past, due, obviously, to COVID restrictions. Our final planned events are a two day drop in to coincide with the Battle of Barnet/Medieval festival, which will be held on Barnet Rugby club fields at the end of Byng Road on September 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, and an Open Afternoon on 10<sup>th</sup> October.

In February, FoBEC responded fully to the Chipping Barnet Community Plan. Various projects have been chosen for funding in the future and we wait to see whether we will be further involved in the project.

FoBEC continues to be part of the Barnet Green Spaces Network, a collaborative group of LBB personnel and 'Friends of' organisations, which shares information and works with Green Spaces officers at Barnet council. We have attended all meetings (via Zoom) this year.

The new bee area has been a great success: there are now 10 working hives and Environment Centre honey is being produced. The Barnet Bee Keepers are very pleased with the arrangement.

Although this has been another challenging year, with continuing COVID lockdowns and restrictions, mixed weather and work being carried out on drainage and path resurfacing, our excellent band of dedicated volunteers has been working hard throughout. The Nature Reserve and the Centre Garden look wonderful and, over the last school term, volunteers have ensured that the site was safe for the groups of school children that started visiting the Centre again. Murky Pond has been refurbished, stumperies and new hedging have been completed in the Monterey Pine triangle, the meadow has been further cared for, the garden and pollinator corner have both been well looked after, paths have been kept clear, all grass areas have been kept mown and all the machinery has been regularly serviced. Caroline updated the Reserve Management Plan and this includes monthly tasks and longer term goals to enable us to plan our work at volunteer sessions.

During the autumn, winter and spring of 2020/21 our Trustees spent many hours planning for the re-laying of the Reserve paths which is a joint Noah's Ark Children's Hospice/FoBEC project. This work involved researching and sourcing the appropriate wheelchair friendly surface and the numbered posts to guide people round the new sensory trail; also there are now benches at the pause and ponder points. We have purchased labels for the trees which will be included in the new tree trail and new chestnut fencing for the south side of the meadow will be erected during this autumn.

Thanks to a very generous grant from the Hadley Trust, we were able to have the paths laid and the benches put in during June and the numbered posts are now positioned in 12 of the 13 information points on the sensory trail. The resurfacing of the service yard and the outdoor activity area is also now completed. Work is currently going ahead to complete the information leaflet for the Sensory Trail.

We hope, COVID restrictions permitting, to return to a more normal arrangement for volunteer working parties from September, which will include a re-instatement of the weekend sessions. A volunteer recruitment drive is planned so that all jobs can be shared by a larger number of people - these jobs include working on the Reserve, but also help with setting up and clearing up on teaching days, stewarding at open events and some small admin tasks.

We look forward to returning to a more normal life at the Environment Centre over the next year, with a further increase in school visits, bigger and better open events and, of course, our ever popular annual Quiz Night.

These are still very exciting times with a lot going on to make the Barnet Environment Centre and Nature Reserve a really important local community resource. Further developments over the next 12 months will present new challenges, but I think we are in a very strong position to meet those challenges and to continue to make the site even more widely accessible to interested people in our local area.

Bernard Johnson                      Chair of Trustees, Friends of Barnet Environment Centre