

“FELTHAM in BLOOM”
ITS HISTORY AND ITS AIMS

The Feltham in Bloom project developed as a direct result of vocal, positive reactions from ordinary members of the Feltham community, expressing the pleasure (and relief) felt by them, when they saw the changes wrought by the Primary School age children from the Victoria Junior School, in clearing and planting up several sections of “Public Space” verges, bordering the walkways leading to the school boundary, spaces which had previously been untended, unkempt, overgrown with noxious weeds and dumping places for drug & alcohol detritus.

With the full support of other, existing environmental activist groups, it was decided to capitalise on this groundswell of goodwill & public affirmation, and to carry this work of cleaning, greening, and beautifying out, into the whole wider area, involving the established commonality of the 3-Town area of Feltham, Bedfont & Hanworth, a regional grouping based on a long, shared History, with a unique Horticultural Heritage.

The new grouping, called “Feltham in Bloom” ,as its first act, duly entered the London in Bloom competition, for 2019.

Now, in spite of the disruptions caused by Covid 19, we have achieved well over 1,000 members in our own Facebook Group, including even followers from countries right across the Globe, and our activities have reached out, locally, into a wide range of sectors -- public, individual, charitable, educational – and had positive effects on hundreds of people.

Updated at 26/01/2021

PUBLIC :

*The RHS Gardening for Schools gave Victoria Jnr a £1,000 prize as one of four finalists in the Schools Champion Award 2018

- FiB won a Bronze Award –(just a few marks off Silver) – in our first entry, London in Bloom 2019.
- FiB won a ‘Certificate of Recognition’ from the Mayor of the London Borough of Hounslow. The Certificate was handed over by the Mayor, in person, at a small public ceremony at Victoria Jnr., attended by members of the school’s Garden Club team.
- Our project has received support and funding from the Heathrow Community Trust.
- Throughout, FiB has been in close contact with various departments of the Local Authority, liaising with them in Planning Groups, in relation to Green / Environmental issues and working through their Comms team to link with Council Tenants, Schools and Borough-wide mail-outs. We’ve had very close cooperation from the COALO maintenance team.
- FiB was part of the Council’s “Community Reference Group for a Greener Borough” –planning for local improvement plans, such as developing Wildflower Strips on roadside verges, working with the Environmental Services team, Hounslow Highways, and a range of Community Environment groups.
- FiB took part in scheduled meetings of the various “Friends of..” groups, where plans & projects were discussed with representatives of the Council’s Parks Department.
- In early November, FiB took part in a (Zoom) session around the Council’s planning for future Environmental Programmes – the “Green Infrastructure Strategy” Workshop , ‘brainstorming’ ideas for positive eco-friendly programmes to enhance all of the Green Spaces across the whole Borough of Hounslow
- FiB was represented at a Hounslow Borough Conference on ‘Future Planning For Allotments’, held at the Holiday Inn, Brentford.

* In collaboration with other local Eco- & “Friends Of..” groups, FiB has been involved in planning discussions for the “Adoption” of the Feltham Railway Station, so that more floral displays can be incorporated into the design/ layout of the station area – currently undergoing major refurbishments.

* FiB has worked to forge bonds and establish collaborations with other similarly-minded environmental groups, such as the “Friends Of..” groups for Bridge House Pond, Feltham Green, Barnes Common and Hanworth Park House. We have kept up communications with the South West London Environmental Network (SWLEN), Produce Growers Unite, Love Parks Hounslow and the 2019 “Bloom Finalists”.

* Through our Facebook group, we have shared our growing & gardening posts with the wider community, through sites such as Hounslow Borough Community , Feltham Community, and the Feltham, Hanworth & Bedfont Appreciation Society. To reach our specific ‘Target Audiences’ of people who might find themselves with little or no space for growing, we also kept “sharing” our FiB stories with local resident groups , like Highfields Community, Old Feltham Residents, & the Feltham Arenas Residents

INDIVIDUAL :

Hundreds of local people have been actively involved in FiB projects.

- Local businesses, large & small, supported our Bloom bid, with donations and by adding new or supplementary floral displays to their premises. The main Retail Area, the Feltham Centre, created extensive additional floral displays, to support the bid.
- Private citizens & communal groups -at street level, or as residents' associations – put their own gardens forward for judging as part of 'Bloom'.
- FiB has taken an active part in many Public & Private "Events", locally, with stalls at Fetes held on Feltham Green, at the Bridge House Pond, indoors at the Reach Academy, at Feltham Library's History Day & at the Bedfont Lane Community Centre.
- At these events, & on visits to local Child-Minding Groups, we've involved children in the practical potting-up of "Feltham First", a very famous, locally developed variety of Early Pea, developed by the world-renowned horticulturalist, Veitch, in his Feltham Nursery.
- On several occasions, FiB has run Weekend Plant Fests, where people have been able to come and take away, for free, a wide range of plants that had either been donated to FiB or grown by Garden Club teams at local schools.
- Throughout, FiB has provided an open, caring & sharing platform on Facebook, where people could seek advice & support, and local people and organisations regularly post there, with stories of their gardening activities – often with photos – & requests for advice or information
- FiB has also made many dozens of 'Home Visits', to deliver Free Plants, or collect Plant donations, not only for FiB members or supporters. Where needed, these visits have included undertaking practical work of clearing, planting-out, pruning, creating new borders or beds, and even laying of a patio.
- Also, 'Home Visits' have involved practical gardening work, by professional gardeners, as members of FiB, giving their services for free, to weed, clear, trim or plant. Often, garden design /advice has been part of these visits.
- When an elderly lady was moving into Care, FiB helped her family to "rescue" roses with extreme emotional significance, so that they could follow her to her new home.
- Through a local riding stables, we have set up a scheme whereby people can come & collect, for free, unlimited quantities of well-rotted horse manure, ready for immediate application to gardens. For people without their own transport, or disabled / vulnerable we have done home deliveries.
- FiB has made contact with & sought practical support from a range of local Allotment Groups, seeking to obtain donations of surplus/ "spare" plants, seeds, etc., for wider ongoing distribution, through our Free Plants scheme, but also to get practical advice & help, via our Facebook group & in 'real life', whereby these experienced gardeners can help beginners to succeed.
- We've worked to find new, additional Allotment plots – on existing sites and by advocating the setting-up of new sites – in conversations with Allotmenters & the Council's Parks Team. Our suggestion has been for the Council's Parks & Open Spaces team to set up brand new mini-plot allotments on open ground very close to town centre high-rise blocks, within walking distance of families without cars, & with NO outside space of their own for growi

COVID 19 :

All of FiB's Plant -Sharing was taken up several notches, in response to the arrival of Covid in early 2020, when we saw the plight of people, trapped in their homes during the first 'Lockdown', many hundreds of them confined in flats & High-Rise blocks, with parents furloughed or redundant, or required to work from home, and, for months, the children off school, too. With many of them having little or no outside space suitable for growing, and even having very few occasions on which they could legitimately get to ground level , outside, in the "real" world, so that there were serious risks to their emotional, psychological, as well as physical health & wellbeing.

- With the consent of HCT, our charity funder, FiB launched a #GrowAtHome project, offering Free Plant Give-Aways, to help anyone who wanted to grow flowers, herbs or veggies, as a true form of "therapy" in such stressful times, and when family finances could be sorely stretched.
- For 9 months, from March till December, FiB has provided this Free Plant service, on 5 days of every week, with 2 -> 3 hours at one or other of our partner schools, and scores of people have gladly availed themselves of the opportunity to begin – or expand – their home-gardening. Many such encounters have been captured in photos, which have regularly featured in FiB's Facebook group, and the recipients have often provided follow-up photo reports of how their plants have fared.
- Most of the Free Plants were, themselves, free to FiB, either as donations from businesses – DIY stores, Garden Centres & even Builders' Merchants – or as gifts from the Council's in-house Garden Maintenance team, or, very often, 'surplus' items from the home gardens & allotments of local people. Now, in the second & third 'Lockdowns', we have supplemented the plant stocks by purchasing material directly –as a kind of belated "Thank You" to the various businesses who had supported FiB earlier with donated plants.
- Our aim is to step up this scheme to a whole new level, both before Christmas, and in the New Year, by purchasing a significant amount of new indoor potted plants and pots of Spring Bulbs, and distributing them, outside shopping centres & near to high-density housing areas, Free, in their hundreds, to get the pleasure of plants into as many homes as possible, through the –(troubled) -- Festive Season & beyond.
- Already, by setting up in the foyer areas of 2 High-Rise blocks near the centre of Feltham, on the Highfields Estate -- BELVEDERE HOUSE & HUNTER HOUSE – we've been able to distribute many potted indoor plants directly to residents, as they returned to the buildings, for them to take straight up to their flats. Again, FiB has posted on our Facebook group, many photos of these encounters, and recipients have followed up, by posting photos of the progress made by their new plants.
- The Covid crisis has drastically altered the situation at schools, and this has been true for the two schools at the heart of the whole FiB enterprise. At both schools, our "Free Plants" sessions have been moved to clearly AFTER-school timings, or even weekends, to minimise contact with children & parents, but people have still been coming in good numbers, either to drop off plant donations or to collect free plants . In addition, FiB was able to "piggyback" with the distribution of Free Lunches from Reach Academy, and give away plants, too, to parents who had come for the lunch parcels.

CHARITABLE:

FiB has had positive contacts with many Charitable / Caring groups.

- ***The Rainbow Trust, Children's Charity***, offering active whole-family support for those affected by life-threatening or terminal illness, have made several plant collections. Different members of their team have chosen plants – herbs , veggies & flowers, specifically suited to the individual families that they're supporting ,in Greater London & across the Home Counties.
- FiB has made practical hands-on gardening trips, in addition to plant donations, to ***Care Homes & Sheltered Accommodation***, across the Borough of Hounslow, advising on plant choice & planting- out, ongoing care, and harvesting. This has included the ***NORWOOD GREEN CARE HOME & BISHOP'S COURT***. In Bedfont.
- Hounslow Council asked FiB to judge an ***"Over 60's Garden Competition"***, in Summer 2019, involving inspection visits to a dozen or more Care Homes / Sheltered Units , as well as a number of private home gardens. The contest was very popular & high standards were achieved across the board.
- We supplied & planted a selection of established shrubs, including a 'sensory strip', for a Hostel in Isleworth, run by the charity, ***Hestia***, supporting vulnerable people, following their discharge from Hospital.
- We have supported & publicised the work of a new, growing Food Charity – ***"FoodWithLove"*** – operating from Osterley & providing 3 meals a day to 500 vulnerable people, right across the Hounslow Borough. As well as encouraging our members to give active support, through volunteering or donations, we have helped to set up an Eco-Friendly re-cycling initiative, by which a local Allotment group –(***Heron Way Community Allotments***)-- could collect & remove all food / veg scraps & peelings, leftover from meal preparations, and re-use them as compost for their growing, thus keeping them out of landfill. Additional 'recycling ' trips involved taking scraps as feed for animals & birds at the ***Hounslow Urban Farm***.

EDUCATION / YOUNG PEOPLE :

(A) VICTORIA JUNIOR SCHOOL.

After the September 2015 intake at VJS, when my granddaughter enrolled, a weekly After-School Garden Club was established and I took on the dual roles of “Garden Mentor” and School gardener.

From practically a bare slate, with the help of the staff, and generous donations of time, labour, transport and materials from many businesses and parents, the school environment was transformed.

- 13 wooden raised-bed planters were built & placed along the front fence & filled with donated soils & plants.(Lavenders, Dahlias, Geraniums, Aquilegia, Agapanthus.etc.)
- A high, 4.5 metre long raised Veggie bed was built and has produced crop after crop of seed-sown veg – sprouts, beans, peas, tomatoes, pumpkins, courgettes, radishes & more.
- A 20 metre strip of hedging -(60 whips, donated by the Woodland Trust)- was planted along the front railing fence, to provide , later, a level of privacy for the children.
- A new 50 metre long Herbaceous Border was planted, along a bare wooden fence, & filled with donated plants and watered along its full length by an underground ‘soaker hose’.
- 3 fruit trees, a pear & 2 cherries, were also planted, as young saplings.
- A start was made on a new ‘Orchard’, when 2 apple trees were planted during a London Live TV visit, filmed with Anthea Turner & our Garden Club team.
- Plans are well under way – only delayed by Covid – to create a fuller, richer fruit orchard, with guidance from the charity, the Orchard Project, and full involvement of the children.
- 3 new low beds were set up beside the Year 3 classes, and the children in each class chose 10 flower seeds, sowed them, planted them out and cared for them, growing.
- For 6 years now, apart from present Covid restrictions, weekly Garden Club sessions have continued and dozens of children have had ‘hands-on’ experience of gardening., from seed sowing, potting on, planting out, and weeding, taking cuttings, dead-heading & harvesting !!
- Produce – both flowers & veggie plants – from the Club’s efforts were sold at School Fairs & by the gates at “Home Time”, to parents & friends.
- When large quantities of plants were donated to the school, through FiB, public “Plant Give-Aways” were held on the weekends, in the staff carpark, when local people could take home, for free, Hydrangeas, Skimmias, Tomatoes, Shrubs, Herbs etc.
- We received 200 bare-root trees for hedging – fruiting & wildlife – from the Mayor of London & TCV, and managed to give every one of them away, free, to local people.
- A bonus intake of plants came from the charity that took up all of the ‘leftover’ plants from the Chelsea Flower Show, and they either joined our school planting or given away, free.
- Some of the Chelsea survivors also went into 4 ex-Council spaces, outside the VJS fence, which we’d –(at long last)- won permission to “adopt”. There, they were joined by Privet trees, Ceanothus, Spring Bulbs, Irises, Gladioli, Primroses, Bluebells, Roses, Agapanthus, Lilies, Hollyhocks, Dahlias, Camellias, Heuchera, Hebe, Cordyline, promising YEARS of colour.
- Plants grown by the Club, plus many others donated by friends, were given away, for 2 or 3 hours on 3 evenings every week at the VJS gate, for 9 months, throughout the 2020 Covid crisis, as a key element of FiB’s #GrowAtHome & Free Plant Give-Aways schemes.

(B) REACH ACADEMY:

Since the middle of 2019, FiB has joined forces with the Outreach arm of the Reach Academy, “the HUB”, and repeated the dual role function begun earlier at Victoria, of gardener AND ‘Garden Mentor’.

- I took on the care, planning & maintenance of an established garden area in the grounds of Reach – known as “the FARM”. (I became ‘Farmer Rob’ to all the kids !!)
- This involved reclaiming 8 very large raised bed gardens, each divided into two, giving 16 separate growing spaces, but which had been untended for some time.
- Initially, young plants, which had been raised from seed at VJS, were introduced – giving us quick-start beds of Kale, Spinach, Peppers & Cabbages. Good inter-school collaboration.
- Then, young gardeners from Reach itself began the planting up of other crops from seed, including squash, lettuces, beetroot, and LOTS of tomatoes. 2 full beds of potatoes went in.
- More planting & general gardening chores were shared by two separate groups of children, who came to the Farm in 2 sessions on each Wednesday lunchtime, while a larger group of “Young Farmers” came for an After-School Club, also on Wednesday. (‘Garden Mentor’ role).
- In line with the ‘Outreach’ role of the “Hub”, work & play sessions were held, on weekends & in holiday times, when whole families came to the Farm, helped with tasks –AND went home with fresh produce that they’d harvested themselves, on the day.
- In a similar vein, FiB, through its Facebook group, added extra volunteers, who came, either after school or at weekends, to clear rough areas of brambles & weeds, and, like VJS, to plant out a hedging line of over 40 young saplings.
- When Covid struck, and even under the restrictions of Lockdown, FiB’s #GrowAtHome & Free Plant Give-Away schemes were readily adopted by Reach, and Give-Away sessions took place on 2 afternoons every week, right through to December 2020, from the ‘Farm’.
- While most children were kept home from school, Reach introduced a full programme of Free Lunches – with well-stocked parcels of food placed out on tables at the front doors of the school every day, attracting a steady stream of takers.
- For FiB, this presented another chance to reach out to NEW people – above & beyond those already being reached through our Facebook group – and both potted plants and freshly-harvested produce were set out, alongside the Lunch parcels, and were warmly welcomed.
- On a more ‘routine’ note, we were also able to promote the planting of decorative, floral spaces, in some of the Farm’s beds, (Lavender, Salvias, Verbascum, Oriental Poppies) and introduce new plants – Skimmia & Lavender – in front of Reach, along Feltham High Street.
- Lately –until it was stopped by the further tightening of restrictions with Lockdown #3 – a new “nurturing” scheme was set up by the ‘Hub’, where local people, adults & children, could visit the Farm for an hour or two on every Monday afternoon, for “Farm & Chat” sessions . This was just starting to build up a following, when it was forced to halt.
- Even at its most restricted, there was still opportunity for Reach to be a key player in getting plants out, to brighten the lives of families cooped up in flats & high-rise blocks, as the Farm provided a base from which – in times when contact with children & parents could be avoided – plants were able to be prepared for distribution. The Farm’s polytunnel gave protection for potting-up large numbers of new plants, purchased specifically by FiB for giving away, and including Primroses, Winter Pansies, and Hellebores. Pots with Hyacinth Trios and Spring Bulb Bonanzas were particularly sought after.