

Grand Opening of the Watford Peace Garden

The Grand Opening of the Watford Peace Garden on Thursday 29 March was an inspiring and uplifting event, the culmination of a lot of thoughts, dream and hard work over the past 4 years. The weather had not been great recently and in the days before, together with a group of Second Generation young people, we worked in the rain getting the garden ready. Fortunately on the Thursday morning the weather cleared and people gradually arrived and assembled in front of the Bridge of Peace arch. Dr Rev Geoffrey Calvert Chair of Watford Interfaith Association (WIFA) welcomed everyone and introduced Jeff Bateman who had spearheaded the project. Jeff thanked all those who made this venture possible in transforming this overgrown half acre in Cassiobury Park into a beautiful Garden with a labyrinth, a variety of trees including an olive tree, a donated circular bench, flowers beds of all sorts and a Peace dove design. Then the Elected Mayor of Watford, Baroness Dorothy Thornhill MBE honoured us with the cutting of the ribbon and invited Françoise Murphy to join her. The Mayor, Patron of WIFA, has been a great support of all our work in Watford. She thanked us saying that in our quiet way we had achieved so much in bringing the Watford faith communities together.

Once the ribbon was cut we all went through the arch into the labyrinth. Then Bella Stuart-Smith, former High Sheriff of Hertfordshire and garden designer, was introduced. She had advised us at the start of the project and was now marvelling on how we had transformed this rough and wild area in such a beautiful place. Dr Rev Geoffrey Calvert then introduced the representatives of 8 different faiths who came to offer their prayers and blessings for the Peace Garden. Christian, Ahmadiyya Muslim, Bahai, Jewish, Hindu, Jain, Muslim and Sikh prayers and blessings were recited and flowed from the centre of the labyrinth to all those around creating an atmosphere of peace, unity and sacredness. Then we all recited the international prayer for world peace together. Suzy Harvey, soon to be the High Sheriff for Hertfordshire, concluded the gathering by saying a few words of congratulation and all were welcome to stay for refreshments and socializing.

This was a very happy time, meeting each other and networking. A great variety of people came to support the Grand Opening: the three mayoral candidates, the two High Sheriffs- past and future, various Councillors, the police, representatives from the various faith communities of Watford, those who have volunteered in the Peace Garden and the Green Gym who have been a great support in many ways lending us their tools and more. Among those in attendance was also the Grant Officer from the Watford Borough Council who assisted us in applying for the £2,000 grant which helped us launch the project. She told us that we are welcome to apply for more funding if needed. A Councillor also offered his financial support. This was a very wonderful event showing us that peace and friendship between people of all faiths is not impossible. We can be a catalyst for Peace when ourselves we are in peace. 'Peace starts with me'.

We welcome volunteers every Wednesday from 10am till 1pm and Sunday from 3 to 5pm. Please call Jeff at 07973 316689 to let him know you are coming. You can follow our progresses at our 'Watford Peace Garden' Facebook page.

Françoise Murphy



The Watford Elected Mayor Baroness Dorothy Thornhill cutting the ribbon



Jeff speaking



People assemble in the labyrinth



The two Hertfordshire High Sheriffs (past and future) Bella Stuart speaking and Suzy Harper (second from the right)



Rev Tim Roberts Head of Christians across Watford offering a prayer



Dorothy receiving flowers and standing on her right Rev Dr Geoffrey Calvert (WIFA Chair)



Peace dove designed by Françoise Murphy