



Celebrating 10 years 2014 -2024



**Friends of Firs Farm (FOFF)
General Meeting
Firs Farm Community Hub
18th January 2024**

What a night

Despite the cold temperatures circa -4 degrees, over 50 residents including nursery/school staff, fitness enthusiasts, Firs Farm Hub management, Trustees & volunteers (FOFF) all turned up to have a peek at the progress of this new building at Firs Farm Wetlands.

Apologies received from: Cllrs Nia Stephens & Cllr Tim Leaver, and Trustees: Geraldine, Lisa & Soulla.

1. Meeting commenced 19:30: the Chair welcomed everyone to the hub thanking them for coming out on such a cold night then went through the relevant building Health and safety procedures (event of fire toilets no smoking etc).

2024 is an exciting year to celebrate: New Hub and 10th anniversary since the constituted group was formed

2. Review 2023: We walked through the last year of events and volunteering works: tree planting (bringing our total to 2500 planted over 10 years, wetlands planting & clean ups, litter picks and vegetation/woodland path management.

Events included 'The Big Give' (scouts), 'Halloween – A spooky walk', Winter trail & Santa's grotto etc.

Thanks were mentioned to all, without whose help we would not be where we are today,

- The numerous volunteers gardening work -outside in all weathers. Monday and Saturdays
- Residents, community groups, schools, nurseries, local businesses who support the charity.
- Enfield council officers for their support in terms of bringing utilities to the Hub.
- Event volunteers - building props, event planning, stewarding, fundraising, sharing information and encouraging others to 'Get out & Get Active' in Firs Farm. Our singing volunteer (Eleanor).
- Thanks to the Boys brigade for the loan of their wonderful sleigh again and all the Santa's who kept the children entertained in the Santa grotto.

So many successful well supported and attended events – Thank you for joining in these.

Thanks, were returned by the audience, for the work carried out by the charity trustees.

3. Firs Farm Community Hub update

It is an unusual project. Usually in green spaces the council owns the building, but not this one. This building is owned by Friends of Firs Farm.

We looked at the year from Jan 2023 when the building modules were first craned into Firs Farm, followed by a succession of challenges and achievements mostly brought about by the fresh water and drainage problems which were, with the support of Enfield council, resolved by December 2023.

Volunteers were able to finally wash their hands and use the toilets for the first time in the Hub on Saturday 16th December 2023. Hurray!

The main cycle path now leads up to the Hub take away (south side of the building) then around the building to the front doors where it reconnects to the main path by 'Orchard Walk'. This provides easy/safe access for cyclists, buggies, wheelchairs, mobility scooters, to move between the building and the main foot /cycle paths.



An inclusive, sustainable building for the community.

- ✓ Cafe kitchen with take away.
- ✓ Sensory room (still in the design stage and needs further funding to fit out)
- ✓ CPT – Changing Places Toilet which is a special adapted room for people & carers.
- ✓ Versatile space for hire for all sorts of activities, meetings, workshops, classes, fitness, health & wellness, personal training, events area etc.
- ✓ A referee changing room with a shower.

Please spread the word of hiring possibilities for when we are ready to open. You can post your interest in the Hub post-box, or email the Friends friendsoffirsfarm@gmail.com

Our funders required that we have businesspeople managing the building to make it sustainable. We introduced local businessmen (our preferred operators: Ken Waterhouse Homecare Preferred (Hub manager) and Richie Hardwicke (Café concession) to say a few words and take some questions with us:

Ken thanked everyone for contributing to the success of bringing the Hub to Firs Farm and let the audience know that there would be much on offer at the hub. Space hire for events may include comedy evening, etc.

Richie explained that Leons (Café) is his son's name. He also owns Chi Chis (local restaurant named after his daughter Lucia. Mentioned that the scope for the offering at the Hub was not set in stone – see how it is received and used. Initial offer will be coffee & cakes etc. then expand on the food/drink in time.

Proposed Hub core open days/hours: 7 days a week 730am – 4pm* but would be reviewed / seasonal. (*Post meeting note: initial opening times will be 8am – 4pm).

Q) Will dogs be allowed in the Hub?

Post meeting note: We will have to come back to this question as a decision has not yet been agreed upon. The Hub is not dog friendly indoors at the moment. We are looking at what outside seating can be available for dog walkers etc. The indoor spaces will be used by schools, children, vulnerable adults and children, so this again needs further discussion when we look at the risk assessment for dogs / assistance dogs.

Q) Will there be automatic doors to the front of the building?

It is not a large building and only has ground floor level, that will either be manned during public opening hours or organised entry/exit during events/room hire so at this moment in time it is not felt necessary to have automatic doors. But this will be monitored.

Q) When will it be open?

The answer is simply ASAP. It is imminent. Probably 2/3 weeks as we need to wait for all the documentation to be in place: planning sign off, O&M manual, risk assessments, policies etc.

There will be an official opening at some point with funders including Enfield council representatives but before then, we want to open the hub and work towards hosting an official opening day.

Q) Is there still a risk of the Crematorium?

Chris Ferrary took us back to the late summer of 2022 when the Enfield Local Plan included a proposal for a crematorium at Firs Farm. Within a short week we had collected thousands of signatures and letters were sent in opposition. We put our case to the council as to why Firs Farm was not a viable solution.

Great news: Firs Farm is not included in the latest published Enfield Local Plan as a site for a crematorium but what is mentioned in Chapter 12 page 310 ^{12.21}

“ This policy seeks to promote and encourage sporting excellence across the Borough, including the development of world-class sports facilities at locations like the Hotspur Training Ground, Picketts Lock (and the immediate surrounding area), Enfield Playing Fields and Firs Farm.”

Q) Do we now have planning sign off for the building?

Planning update for the Hub provided by Chris Ferrary, that the final items for lighting and waste collection are due to be signed off by the council shortly.

Once open, this building will make a difference.

- At long last - a café, toilets, and space to come together.
- Volunteers – finally handwashing and drinks in all weathers.
- Schools / visiting educational establishments and councils looking to learn from the award-winning Firs Farm wetlands projects – toilets for educational /other visits to Firs Farm wetlands.
- Changing Places Toilet– ‘everyone, regardless of their access needs or disability or reliance on the assistance of carers or specialist equipment, can use a toilet facility with dignity and hygienically!’

There was a short break for refreshments and hub walkabout.

4. Fundraising

Q) Is further funding needed?

Helen Osman updated: Yes, we will still need to be fundraising. Ken & Richie need to make the hub sustainable. There will be a revenue stream based on hiring the premises, events etc, some of which will be passed to the Charity to be used to continue to improve ‘Firs Farm Wetland’s’ for public benefit. We are ambitious, so we are still going so that we can continue to build on the Hub, surrounding area but our immediate fund raising is to provide for example Landscaping.

The Friends have raised in excess of £300k so far for the Hub. COVID/rising costs had an impact on the costs rising so funds were stretched. We still have outstanding items on our wish list c£40-50k still needs to be raised for these: e.g. defibrillator, sensory room final design & fit out, landscaping, bike/buggy shelter, etc.

Our acronym is HERBS which we include in every bid for funds:

Health, **E**nvironmental education, **R**ecreation, **B**iodiversity, **H**ealth

5. Proposed events 2024 –(we need volunteers for this please)
Quiz night, spooky walk for Halloween, Christmas market / Grotto, Easter quiz hunt. Hub open day summer 2024 and hopefully and Summer festival event for 2025
Suggestions from the audience of events they would like:
-Pancake Day at the Hub, Forest type school / Eco club activities, A craft fair (People could rent a space to sell their wares. Makers will be inclined to make good stuff as they are renting to sell). We will look through these and discuss with the group as to what we can undertake at this time.

6. Volunteering & Green space projects
Lots of volunteering opportunities. Meet each week usually on Mondays and Saturdays. Sign up by emailing the Friends friendsoffirsfarm@gmail.com

Trees: Volunteers and community, have planted more than 2500 trees already planted since the group began, but we need to plant more as not all survive. Usual survival rates are c.70%. We have exceeded that. Tree planting annual event usually takes place in early December (for community). Newly planted trees need 20-40litres in hot dry weathers.

Q Council water butts are great idea but they need filling so community can help water trees?
The council have said they will do this but unfortunately, other parks took priority last year. We persevered with the help of many volunteers, our bowser, wheelbarrows and bottles filled with water to support our trees each week. We hope council will support the watering going forward. Are you interested in helping with planting and caring for trees. Support provided to settle you in.

Helen: Last November we attended an event for sustainability and the council watercourses team won an award for the wetlands work in Enfield. Now we have a classroom we can put Firs Farm on the map for an environmental case study. We are a leading example for the local environment. Local authorities from around the country come for wetland tours and to meet the friend's group and we want to expand on this with the hub in place.

We have provided wetlands tours to many different visiting councils, universities, schools, Enfield, U3A and many other groups. A lot of interest in the environmental stuff but also in the fact that the wooden windows that overlook the wetlands by the outdoor classroom area was recycled from the old Tilbury docks.

If you are interested in the environment and would like to help with wetlands tours, get in touch.

We need more volunteers to make all this stuff happen We will support you through FREE volunteer training: e.g. water clean ups, first aid, defibrillator, gardening group lead, wetland tours and much more.

Please give a little if you can by volunteering or make your donations to the Charity.

Thank you for coming. Explaining who volunteers/trustees etc. Any questions?

7. Other business: Trees & benches mentioned:
Toni is working talking to the council issues raised: graffiti, fallen trees and benches. An update will be provided once she hears back from Cllrs.

Until the next time at the Hub 😊 Thank you all for attending.