



Friends of Springfield Park
& Guiseley Wells

Take a Seat BENCH



To commemorate the
kindness and resilience of the
people of Leeds during the
2020 pandemic.



THE STORY BEHIND THE BENCH

The Friends of Springfield Park & Guiseley Wells were delighted to hear at Christmas 2020 they'd been awarded an historic Leeds Civic Trust 'Take A Seat' Bench to commemorate the kindness and resilience of the people of Leeds during the Pandemic of Spring 2020: perfect, they thought, for the historic community location of Guiseley Wells.

Guiseley Wells, fed by ancient natural springs, is said to be the reason why the township grew up around it. After the Wells fell into dilapidation at the end of the 20th century, residents worked to restore the Wells area as a community hub. The Friends were therefore more than happy to fulfil the Civic Trust's condition that local residents should be involved in the bench's design so that it was their experiences of the 2020 Pandemic that were reflected.

The results from the Friends' community consultation, brought many to tears – a reaction to the positive finding that the community had not sunk into the depths of fear and gloom. Instead, they had stoically weathered the storm: seeking solace in their natural landscape, sharing experiences and knowledge – despite all the social distancing – and inventively finding ways to support and cheer up others – very little of it online!

The legacy being a stronger community, succinctly described by one lady – *“we have chatted, laughed, and cried with our neighbours, which we wouldn't have ever done before. We didn't even know most of their*

names before the Pandemic”.

The Friends did not ask people how they felt about the Spring 2020 Pandemic, it would be impossible to get an accurate answer a year on from the event, with so much else happening in-between. However, other research done at the time showed significant increases in mental distress in the population. So, how had Guiseley coped? What the Friends found was that the outdoors had become a 'health farm'; people bathed in the natural environment to counter and heal all the negative experiences and public noise.

A strong 'sense of purpose' built into lockdown activities, brought back lost control; people described '*exploring*' walks of the local area, '*renovating*' a garden and '*teaching*' children to fly a kite. None of these were lonely activities; a deep sense of companionship came across in people's stories, from taking time to stop and talk on walks, to neighbourliness through the sharing of seeds, homemade cake and photographs of local treasures discovered.

Having time to stare at their own patch, to watch nature unfurl all around, from the changing light of the day to the seasons, helped people take the long view and grounded them in the rhythm of life – *“the pandemic couldn't stop that”* they said.

When asked to send pictures of what was most noticeable, the



Friends got swathes of woodland wild garlic, a fluffy family of cygnets in Nunroyd Park, colourful wild and cultivated flowers, and above all birds. The fact that birdsong had become more noticeable with the reduction of road and air traffic noise was mentioned time and time again: nature was reclaiming her realm, and a dawn chorus has become a feature on the bench!

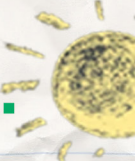
During the Pandemic, two national events occurred, Easter and VE Day. These, together with other community 'art' initiatives such as the rainbows put up in windows, released a wellspring of innovation. People's creativity went public, aimed at putting a smile on the faces of 'passers-by'; streets and parks became an art gallery, a concert hall, and a community centre; culminating in the Thursday clapping and the VE day decorations and street parties. A special mention must also go to the various voluntary and community groups who stepped up and organized everything from the provision of scrubs for medical needs to street choirs.



Through the project, the Friends gained material for the bench design as well as insight into community self-help, something that national press and Government advertising ignored in their apocalyptic reporting. The Pandemic left a legacy of a deeper intimacy with what is 'local' and greater community interaction to build on: extremely valuable community capital – which should not wantonly be destroyed.

Jennifer A Kirkby
21st July 2021

What our community said...



Everything thrived. We became more aware of our garden visitors and tried to help them with food and nesting boxes

Between us we made hundreds of sets of scrubs which went all over the country to wherever they were most needed



Seeing the natural environment coming alive and thriving during the pandemic gave me an escape and hope for the future

Peoples creativity was aimed at putting smiles on people's faces

We had a weekly quiz in our road when it was Thursday clap for carers so met many young neighbours who normally were too busy to talk

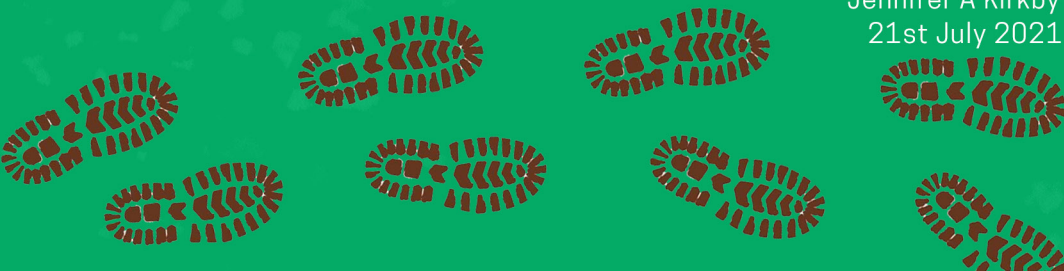


I stitched patchwork squares for the Guiseley Theatre banner, made snowflakes and stitched hearts for Nunroyd Park

The support people have provided has been humbling



Everything became more local, noticing the immediate surrounding instead of rushing into the distance.



HOW RESIDENTS INFLUENCED THE DESIGN

After the consultation, artist Lucy Phillips, cleverly worked the responses into a design. This, then had to be translated onto the slatted bench – no mean feat – and made as long lasting as possible!

Remembering those who left us

Flying a kite with Dad

Bird Watching

Home baking

National Events Celebrated

Lending a hand



Gardens were tended and admired. Forget-me-nots bloomed

Learning the names of wildflowers and butterflies

The Aireborough landscape grounded people

Children loved the field animals and left painted stones to be found



The bench arrives!



The Leeds Owl

The dawn chorus sing 'Happy Birthday'

Exploring and sharing discoveries

Sharing and growing produce

Streets became Art Galleries



Cycling and dog walking for exercise and companionship

The Nunroyd swans brought great comfort

Easter was a relevant time

Time to notice the tiny bugs

"I am very grateful to have played a part in this exciting and historic project. Reading how my own community came together, and creating a design for the bench has been both therapeutic and joyful for me as an artist and I hope the people of Guiseley enjoy the bench – as a place of conversation and reflection – for many years."

Lucy Phillips, Artist

Find out more about our community consultation



Scan the QR code or head to...
<https://bit.ly/benchresearch>



GUISELEY WELLS

If it were not for the work of local residents and the support of local councillors since 1999, Guiseley's historic Wells would be a far less attractive place than they are today – they would be enclosed behind a wall with a tarmac car park opposite. The determination, resource and skill of many people have been brought to bear to conserve this ancient community hub: the bench with its unique design is just the latest improvement.

Bench Provided by – Leeds Civic Trust , Take A Seat Project

Artist and Designer – Lucy Phillips, Codswallop CIC

Project Manager – Jennifer Kirkby

Friends Team - Lynda Kitching, Eleanor Thomson, Becky Mears, Jacob Phillips, Geoff Brook

Pocket Park Paving and Bench Fitting - Linden Homes

Wells Millennium Restoration – Guiseley Wells Society , Aireborough Rotary Club, Heritage Lottery Fund

Wells Maintenance – Geoff Brook and Peter Wood

Wells Planter Maintenance – Guiseley In Bloom

Wells Pocket Park Improvements – Aireborough Neighbourhood Forum, Cllrs Graham Latty and Paul Wadsworth

Herb Planter Maintenance – Incredible Edible Aireborough

**Join The Friends and Make A Difference
to your local community**



Friends Secretary at aireboroughnp@gmail.com



Friends of Springfield Park & Guiseley Wells

*Guiseley
Wells
Society*

Rotary



**AIREBOROUGH
NEIGHBOURHOOD
DEVELOPMENT
FORUM**



**GUISELEY
IN BLOOM**



**INCREDIBLE
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