

A creative courtyard garden project at Jonathan Feedham Court to foster a greater sense of community and to promote physical and mental wellbeing.

These 1974-built bungalows are managed by the almshouse charity, Wivenhoe Housing Trust – charity no. 1090578 and AA member no. 488.

The Project

This project to enhance the lives of residents at Jonathan Feedham Court Wivenhoe, was initiated in 2017. The Trustees looked to turn an existing drab courtyard into something more exciting for the 7 residents. After involving the residents in discussions, ambitious plans were agreed to make the courtyard a much better space for the residents to relax and socialise in, and for it to be an area which would promote physical health through exercise, and mental wellbeing by taking a greater interest in plants and gardening. It did this by including: raised flower beds, 4 bench seats and screening to give greater privacy to the residents as well as plenty of safe, level space for the several residents who rely on walking aids when moving around. It was also decided to raise the level of the new courtyard paving to get rid of the unsightly access ramps and provide level access from the properties to the courtyard.

The courtyard before work started:



Project Involved

The project first involved digging up the existing courtyard to lay new surface–water drains and around the outside of the 7 bungalows.

Later, work started on installing the raised beds and new block-paving to both change the atmosphere in the courtyard as well as raise the level of the courtyard to provide a level access to all 7 bungalows; 4 residents have mobility scooters and 4 can now only walk with the use of walking aids.

The type of block-paving selected was especially chosen for its ability to provide a SuDS compliant self-draining system. This involved blocks with wider permeable joints, filled with fine gravel, and laid on a thick bed of permeable material to make the whole area self-draining. This meant avoiding the need for numerous gullies which would have made the whole area more difficult to negotiate for older people who could be unsteady on their feet.



Power sockets were incorporated in the raised beds so that things like twinkling lights on a Christmas tree at the appropriate time of the year are easily possible. Existing timer-controlled courtyard lights means that the seating area can be enjoyed well into the evenings.

The Result

Now, block-paving and raised beds surrounds an intimate seating area with 4 x 3-seater benches giving plenty of room for the 7 residents at Jonathan Feedham Court.



The Benefits

For the first-time, this new seating area with its Indian sandstone flooring provides a focal point to the courtyard, creating an extremely pleasant outdoor area and one designed to encourage residents to come out and socialise.

The residents have been regularly having coffee together on sunny days during the summer. The courtyard faces south and so gets both sun and shade according to the time of day.

Generous space around the raised beds allows for residents to exercise with their walking frames or use their electric buggies to get to their homes. The addition of 3 offset screening panels at the front of the courtyard adds to the privacy which the residents can now enjoy for the first time since the bungalows were built in 1974.



The plants that have been chosen for the raised beds had been especially selected to provide year-round interest as well as different leaf forms, colours and textures. Whilst initially planted up by our gardener, the residents have taken responsibility for maintaining the flower beds since then as well as adding summer bedding plants to create colour in them.

Providing the raised beds has meant that all the plants can be more closely enjoyed by those of the residents who are or have become disabled by age, now more than half of them.

A Resident's View

Pam Glover, one of our residents with an extreme physical handicap said: "It is a pleasure now to go into the new courtyard garden. The communal seating area, arranged as it is within a grouping of raised flower beds, gives a sense of seclusion and intimacy that encourages residents to gather together and chat. This is great as a lot of us lead very restricted lives. I certainly use the garden more often now than I used to. And, yes, it has enhanced my life. I'm sure my health has benefited to from being out in the open more regularly. Just feeling the sun on your face makes you feel better. That and being with nature (flowers and humming bees) is just so beneficial to the soul... well done indeed to those who helped create it."

Recording History

The cost of the landscaping works was around £31,000. This was in part financed by a legacy to the Trust from a local resident, Celia Hirst. Her name is now recorded on a plaque together with that of the original benefactor which says:

These 7 bungalows at Jonathan Feedham Court are managed by the Trustees of Wivenhoe Housing Trust, an almshouse charity, no.1157022.

They are the legacy of Jonathan Feedham who lived on Wivenhoe Quay and, when he died in 1718, left £50 for the benefit of poor sailors and their widows.

In 2014, Celia Hirst, a jazz musician of Wivenhoe, died leaving some money to the Trust which part-funded the cost of refurbishing this courtyard that was completed in 2020.

Sadly, the official opening and planned celebration of the new courtyard which was due to held in May 2020 had to be cancelled due to the Covid pandemic restrictions.

Conclusion

All the Trustees as well as the residents are very pleased with the way the entire project has turned out, exceeding all expectations. It has clearly enhanced the lives of our residents. It has enhanced their physical health as well as their mental wellbeing. It

has proved especially invaluable this year because of the Covid-pandemic which has meant that the residents have had little opportunity to go out as they all fall into that 'vulnerable' category. It has been a Project about which we and the residents can all feel justifiably proud.

Wivenhoe Housing Trust

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