

Three major local charities have given support for the River Valley Park project, rowing lake and enabling development. The remit of charities is essentially to work for the benefit of the community and the following gives an insight into their activities. The Bedford Charity (The Harpur Trust) and the Kathleen and Michael Connolly Foundation both support the elderly and those in education, whilst The Marston Vale Trust is committed to reversing 100 years of the effects of industrialisation on the landscape to provide a community asset for all.



The Bedford Charity (The Harpur Trust) stems from a gift of property in Bedford and London made by Sir William Harpur and his wife, Dame Alice, in 1566 to the town of Bedford. Sir William executed a deed of gift creating an endowment to sustain a school he had already established in Bedford.

The endowment made provision for the marriage of poor maids of the town, for deprived children to be nourished and informed and for any residue to be distributed to the poor of the town. The Charity was founded by an Act of Parliament in 1764 and is administered under a Scheme sealed by the Charity Commission on 1 September 2000.

There are 26 Trustees who form an incorporated Governing Body: 12 are nominated and 4 are representative members and the remaining 10 are co-opted, elected by Trustees. Today The Bedford Charity employs over 1400 people in Bedford and is one of the 200 largest charities in the UK, but a local one, with three charitable objectives:

- the promotion of **education**;
- the **relief** of those who are sick or in need, hardship or distress;
- the provision of **recreational facilities** with a social welfare purpose within the town of Bedford and the surrounding area.

Grant Making -The Charity is a major contributor to valuable community activities within the Borough of Bedford. Grants are awarded from the Charity's responsive programme totalling approximately £500,000 each year, plus a number of themed grant programmes awarding up to £100,000 each year for each theme. The current themed grants programmes are:

- Excellence in Education
- Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Support
- Homelessness
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Almshouses - The Charity has been providing almshouses for over 200 years and currently offers 40 places for frail or elderly people of the Borough in its almshouses that are located in Bedford and Bromham. Bedford Citizens Housing Association (BCHA) currently manages the almshouse provision on the Charity's behalf.

The Schools - The Charity is most well known for administering the four main schools of the Harpur Trust all of which take pupils from 7 to 18 years:

- Bedford School – a boys' boarding and day school
- Bedford High School – a boarding and day school for girls
- Dame Alice Harpur School – a day school for girls
- Bedford Modern School – a co- educational day school

Pilgrims Pre-Preparatory School was set up by the Charity in January 1998 to offer education to children from 3 months to 7 years. It is run by Harpur Pre-Preparatory Schools Ltd a separate charitable company.

Academy Sponsorship and Trusts - The Charity is currently working with Bedford College, John Bunyan Upper School and central and local government to explore the possibility of sponsoring John Bunyan Upper School to become an Academy. The school serves a deprived area of Bedford that suffers from many challenges including high unemployment. The Charity has been involved with the school for many years and has provided funding for several specialist projects and the school's bid for specialist college status.

Over the next six to nine months the Charity will work with its Academy partners in the feasibility stage of the proposal, which includes looking at the detail of the educational and building plans. At the end of this stage, if all parties agree, the funding agreement is signed and the parties are formally committed to the project. The aim is to have the new Academy building ready for occupation by September 2012. The Academy will open in existing buildings as soon as possible after the funding agreement is signed.

The Charity has also recently decided to support the formation of local, maintained sector school trusts by accepting invitations to join trust Boards and establish educational links between its schools and those in the trusts.

Young and old benefit from The Harpur Trust:



New books for Queens Park Lower School



Listening to music at the Almshouse Summer Party

For more information on the Charity please visit: www.bedfordcharity.org.uk or call 01234 369500.



The Forest of Marston Vale is the largest environmental regeneration project in Bedfordshire covering an area of 61 square miles stretching from the M1 to Willington. It is one of twelve Community Forests in England established in the early nineties, with a forty year planned delivery period.

All of England's Community Forests were set a Government target of achieving 30% woodland cover by 2031, engaging with communities and businesses to repair a damaged landscape. The Forest is being delivered by an independent registered charity, **the Marston Vale Trust**. The Trust is a social enterprise - a commercial venture based at the Forest Centre in Marston Moretaine, that donates all profits from its conferencing and catering business to the parent charity. The charity in turn supports The Forest Team, which brings in funding from a wide range of sources and delivers high quality natural and wild places with great public access for everyone to enjoy.

- Over the last five years, the Marston Vale Trust has brought in an average of £1.4m every year, for projects in the Vale.
- The Trust has acquired 1,300 acres across the Vale (including 300 acres in the Bedford River Valley Park). We continue to add to this, and to create publicly accessible community woodlands in partnership with local communities.
- In the winter of 2007/8, over a thousand people helped us plant trees in the Vale and we planted our one millionth tree.
- The Trust has a very active and invaluable Volunteer section. In 2007 the hundred or so volunteers recorded 7,700 hours of volunteer time in support of the aims of the Forest.
- The Forest Centre receives around 140,000 visits each year, and the Park (which was awarded a Green Flag again this year) around 400,000.

The Marston Vale Trust produced the Bedford River Valley Park Framework document following consultation with thousands of local people and experts. This document is defining what the BRVP will look like and how it will benefit local people for sport, recreation and wildlife. It will take many years, numerous partners and millions of pounds to create the Bedford River Valley Park but we believe that the process of creation and the end result will transform the Eastern approach to Bedford.

To see the BRVP Framework and learn more about the Forest of Marston Vale and the Marston Vale Trust, visit: www.marstonvale.org

KATHLEEN & MICHAEL CONNOLLY FOUNDATION

The following comments from the Foundation's annual report and accounts for 2007/08 are by the Chairman, Michael Connolly and best describe the Foundations formation and activities in the last three years since its formation.

You will see it is a very personal ambition of Michael Connolly to benefit the community and so the influence of the Foundation in the BRVP and lake project is highly significant in ensuring the community does indeed benefit. The Foundation was created in memory of my late wife Kathleen and her work for the community in Bedfordshire over fifty years and as a return to the county for enabling us to succeed in business during that period. The objectives are to improve the lives of the disadvantaged elderly, and to improve the chances in life of young people through education, working principally through established charities and learning establishments.

Our concern is to encourage young people to take a relevant degree or advanced apprenticeship, so as to become assets to the community in adult life. Currently one third of graduates are no more employable than when they left school. We follow closely the requirements of the Charities Act 2006 in delivering public benefit and have been able to double our financial commitment in each year amounting to £400,000 in total.

The Foundation is unusual in that it was endowed with a controlling interest in two trading companies based in Luton, Connolly Homes Plc and in Belfast, Dingles Builders (NI) Ltd. This model has since been followed by other organisations. Following considerable reorganisation and streamlining of the group in anticipation of the present recession, we disclose land and building works at some £50,000,000 after substantial write downs, and zero net bank borrowing for the group, putting us in a strong position for any upturn in the economy in the future. The Foundation is in sufficient funds to cover desired outgoings over the next two years. We appreciate all those skilled and loyal employees in the group who have worked to bring about the present position and helped deliver benefits to so many people. I would also thank my fellow Trustees for giving unstintingly of their skills and time over the period.

Trustees: Michael Connolly; Michael Callanan; Andrew Rowe

For more information on the foundation visit: www.connollyfoundation.org.uk



Kate Watts from the Foundation at the opening of the Kathleen Connolly wing at the Leonard Cheshire Home.



Connolly Homes are now providing housing at Norse Road Bedford, Rushden, Baldock, Henlow, Biggleswade and Willington.

Visit: www.connollyhomes.co.uk