



Buckby Library & Hub *for books & buzz*

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Coronavirus Recovery Gardens: End of Project Report

Buckby Library & Hub (BL&H) is a community managed library and social hub led and run by volunteers in the village of Long Buckby, Northamptonshire. BL&H was set up in the aftermath of budget cuts in the County Council which affected many libraries across the county that either had to close or find new ways of continuing their operations. We became a registered charity and have been fortunate enough to have our Parish Council lease the building from the County Council. The County Council continues to support the library management system, and a grant from Daventry District Council helped cover our basic costs during the initial period of operation. Otherwise, we fund-raise locally or apply for grants to support our activities.

During the Covid lockdowns, we had to close to the public however this period also gave us an opportunity to improve our small garden areas around the building. Thus was our Coronavirus Recovery Gardens Project born!

We applied to The Nineveh Charitable Trust for a grant towards the costs of this project and we were awarded £3,500. The Trust's contribution covered the cost of ground preparation and paving in our Market Place garden as well as the installation of benches. We were fortunate to gain grants from three other organisations to enable us to carry out and complete the whole project, which included:

- Installing an all-weather, permanent gazebo in our courtyard garden behind the building (see Figures 1 and 2): the gazebo enables groups to meet and have activities outside – for example, a local walking group often has its refreshments there (Figure 2), and, during warm weather, small children and their carers can do Rhymetime while older people can meet for social afternoons.
- Redesigning and replanting the grassy area and borders round our small car park (Figures 3 and 4). We have installed raised beds (Figure 5) which have been filled with a range of pollinator-loving plants, and replanted the borders. Bulbs have been planted in the grass so we wait for Spring to see the effect. The Parish Council also helped enhance the area by refurbishing a much-used old and battered bench by the grass.
- Redesigning, paving, installing raised beds and benches, and replanting our previously degraded Market Place garden (Figures 6 and 7), where people can sit and enjoy the flowers and shrubs as well as watch the world go by. We carried out some temporary planting in the raised beds to lift people's spirits (Figure 8). The final planting and ground cover (Figure 9) were completed in the autumn (2021) so we are now waiting for Spring and Summer 2022 to see the full effect!

Throughout, we have aimed to provide both colour and sensory stimulus as well as use plants loved by pollinators. We are very pleased with the outcome and can't wait to see what the Spring and Summer of 2022 will bring.

Of course, the project was not without its challenges during the pandemic. For example, there were supply chain issues with materials and price increases; and it was more difficult to meet up and engage with other organisations in the village. In spite of this, we have had strong moral and practical support, in particular from the Gardening Club whose members helped with the clearing, 'muck-spreading' and planting, and from the Park Manager from Cotton End Park (part of a Green Spaces group in the village), who kindly supplied his vehicle for transporting the well-rotted manure (Figure 10).

Although we have not been able to carry out all the educational work we intended, when lockdown eased we were able to organise three evening talks in the library building on environmental issues, timed to coincide with the end of COP26. Figure 11 shows the posters advertising the events. Kicking off the series was author and RHS adviser as well as our garden designer for the project, Andrew Mikolajski, who spoke on 'Permaculture for Gardeners'. He was followed by Long Buckby naturalist (and Cotton End Park Manager, mentioned above), Nick Roberts. Nick gave a presentation on 'A Future for our Wild Life?' with particular reference to our local fauna. Finally, farmer and innovator, Mark Jelley, explained the possibilities and challenges for 'Sustainable Farming' based on the experience and initiatives to promote sustainability on their family farm. Although we had to limit and socially distance the participants, we had full houses and many appreciative comments, as well as donations for the upkeep of the gardens. The series was picked up and featured in the local newspaper, the Daventry Express.

We have also received some very positive testimonials:

"I have enjoyed volunteering for the library garden and meeting new people. It has already brought a lot of positive comments from villagers and that is before the flowerbeds have even been seen at their best in summer. There is no doubt that this will enhance the village centre and generate a feeling of well-being." (Shona McNamee, Long Buckby Gardening Club)

"The library volunteers have worked hard to improve the external parts of the library area, there is now a much improved garden area opening onto the market square where villagers are able to sit and catch up on news with friends, or just watch the world go by. It has significantly improved the central market square area of the village. This also enhances the outside area of the building as well making it an inviting prospect to people as they walk by." (Julie Hill, Parish Councillor)

"We would like to say a big thank you to the Nineveh Charitable Trust for their funding towards the library garden improvements in Long Buckby. Such a difference has been made, not only to the look of our library, but to that whole corner of the village centre. It is charming and inviting, especially with a bench for people to sit and watch the world go by or even to sit and read a book on a good day! We have had many positive comments from customers too. All this adds to the shopping experience in our great village. Thanks again for your generosity!" (Mary and Mike, The Peephole gift shop)

We would be delighted to send more photographs of the garden areas when they are in bloom and we welcome visitors. In the meantime, please go to our blog on the Buckby Library & Hub website which documents and illustrates the phases of the project: <https://buckbylibraryhub.org/follow-our-recovery-gardens-project/>.

Thank you, Nineveh Charitable Trust!

[Please insert Figures 1-11]

Figure 1 Courtyard no awning

Figure 2 Walking group under the gazebo

Figure 3 Grassy area of the car park before the project

Figure 4 Degraded borders in the car park

Figure 5 Planting the raised beds in the car park area

Figure 6 Market Place Area before the project 1

Figure 7 Market Place Area before the project 2

Figure 8 New benches, raised beds and temporary planting in Market Place area

Figure 9 Ground cover planting in Market Place

Figure 10 Transporting the manure

Figure 11 Where are we going posters