

FORE STREET HEAVITREE (AND ENVIRONS)
The Heavitree Squilometre Project
ENTRY FOR SW IN BLOOM
IT'S YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSESSMENT

July 2018

Background

Fore Street, Heavitree was recognised by Exeter City Council as an area in need of "improvement". In 2017 they commissioned a Place-Based survey of the street to assess the quality of experience for users and the potential for community-led initiatives to enhance the trading/living environment.

Three main recommendations were made in this survey:-

- 1) Bring more focus to Fore Street through **community-led activity**.
- 2) Run "**Clean and Green**" project with local groups and residents. Focusing on improving the appearance and quality of experience of Fore Street.
- 3) Develop a "**Heart of Heavitree**", finding creative ways to celebrate the street's long trading heritage.

Potential partners in this work were identified through social networking and leafleting on the street. These included:-

The two local schools, St Michael's CofE Primary Academy and Ladysmith Junior School, the Heavitree *Squilometre* arts-based community group, the Fore Street traders, donating businesses and most crucially, the **Green Pod**. The Green Pod are a team of local residents and enthusiasts who took on the task of unknottting all of the barriers to greening Fore Street that have stopped this work in the past. Section 106, developers funding, has been released by ECC for this work.





The site of Nat West Bank – empty for well over 12 months



Another empty unit on South side – empty for well over 24 months

Fore Street before the project

Particular problems have been associated with Fore Street, Heavitree for the last 10 years.

- 1) Increasing traffic flow means that the street regularly returns some of the worst ECC monitored **air quality** results in the City. Its proximity to the Devon Ambulance Service and Devon and Cornwall Police headquarters at Middlemoor and Heavitree Road means that disrupting sirens are frequent and traffic noise pollution is high.
- 2) **Empty units** – the demise, some time ago, of a Local Traders Association and diminishing footfall has meant the closure of many businesses with long-term empty units and increasing numbers of charity-based outlets.
- 3) **Lack of greenery** – Past ECC commissioned local consultations consistently returned a desire to see more greenery, preferably trees, on Fore Street. Difficulties raised by the fact that much of the pavement is owned by different landlords and the presence of underground utilities had always stopped work and the street remained sterile and devoid of any greenery (with the exception of a small area near the Royal Oak). Lack of action after consultation had resulted in “consultation fatigue” and local disengagement with council-led initiatives.

What we did

Under the governance of Interwoven Productions CIC, local Place-Making specialists, residents acting through the Heavitree *Squillometre* community-arts group and the newly formed Green Pod met to discuss the potential of working in partnership with local schools and the local traders to create three separate projects that would result, not only in improvements to the environment, but also forge on-going links between the local residential and trading communities.

The three projects

1) FLAGS FOR FORE STREET

Thirty local traders were encouraged to allow the installation of colourful community flags on their properties – designed by **sixty local children** from St Michael's CoE Primary Academy. The Heavitree *Squillometre* provided a community-artist to workshop with the children to create individual, Heavitree-celebrating, designs. This was combined with sessions with Sustrans, including their Big Street survey, where the children were encouraged to consider alternative forms of transport and the benefits of shopping locally.

In fact, the first set of flags suffered so badly in the poor air quality that, after two months, we had to replace them. The second set uses the same great, children-designed emblems but in brighter colours to resist discolouration.

We took the opportunity though to take the original flags back into the school so that the children could assess them as part of the national Air Quality Day, again in partnership with Sustrans.

They will now be washed and donated to the school to help create lasting decoration there while the new, bright flags remain on the street until Christmas when they'll be replaced by Christmas trees.





2) THE GREENING OF FORE STREET – “THE GREEN POD”

Heavitree proudly boasts its very own guerrilla gardener, Orlando Murrin, who has single handedly created a beautiful display, in a range of white and blue blooms, to celebrate Blue Jay Way, just off of Fore Street.

So, it was an obvious move for JoJo Spinks of the Heavitree *Squillometre* to ask him to help form a small group, or “Pod”, of greening enthusiasts who could tackle the historic obstacles to greening on Fore Street itself. We were also very lucky to attract the help of Amy Shelton, local environmental artist whose work is an integral part of the Princesshay bee project and whose charity, *Honeyscribe*, provided workshops for our participating youngsters, highlighting the importance of protecting our pollinating species. The Green Pod was also delighted to welcome Rachel Cooper, Yr 4 teacher at St Michael’s and lead for their Gardening Club who are currently working for their RHS Level 3 award. Jen Harris and Emily Chamberlain, local residents and keen environmental activists, completed the team.

Together the Green Pod set about resolving issues of ownership, permissions, access, maintenance, sourcing and installation to create a planting scheme for Fore Street that is highly community-involved AND environmentally beneficial.

And we’re thrilled to say the bees are back already!!



Troughs and planters

Orlando sourced the troughs and planters from Landworks at Dartington. They are made from locally sourced larch, chosen because they do not require artificial weather treatment. Landworks provide training and employment opportunity for current and ex-prisoners. The company worked flexibly with us to create large troughs for our wider pavements and smaller planters where Risk and Impact Assessment restricted size.

Orlando and Amy also took charge of the planting which subscribes to a pollinator-friendly scheme with fragrant plants designed to freshen and enhance our air. So, whilst not traditionally brightly bloomed, local residents and traders have been delighted to see pollinating activity on our street again for the first time in many, many years. Some of the planting was donated by St Bridget's Nursery and some by local residents.

The project was also extremely fortunate to attract the attention of local forestry company, Free Range Forestry, who were able to access DCC compost for us. They volunteered not only to collect three truck loads (a staggering 3600 litres of compost!) but also helped us fill each of the troughs and planters with active wheelbarrow enthusiasm.

Volunteers

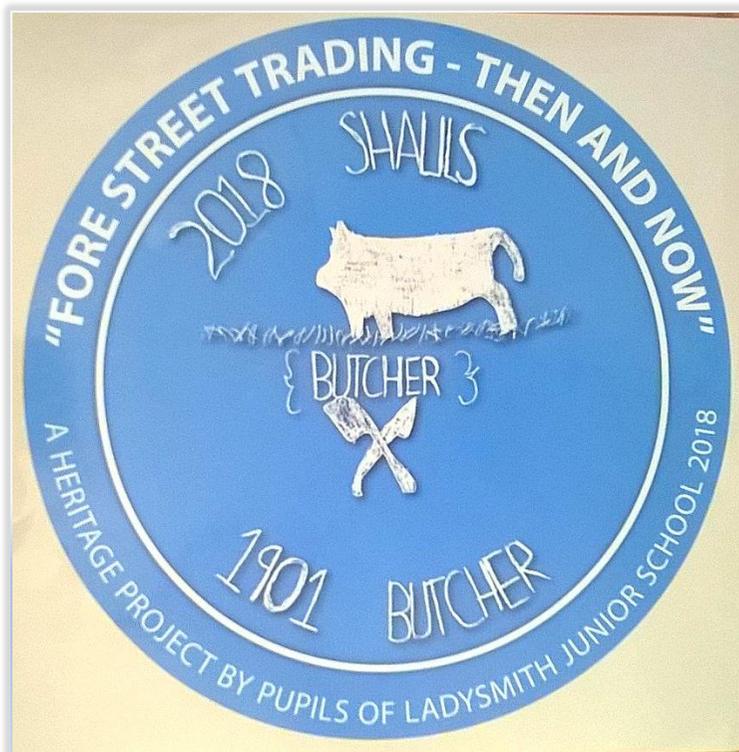
We were blessed by the willing hands of local residents who donated plants and gamely trundled wheelbarrows through Heavitree to help us fill the planters. Rachel Cooper and the gardening club took charge of one of the large troughs planting up strawberries and other delights to ripen in the sunshine there. Finally, a huge thank you is due to **sixteen individual traders who stepped up and agreed to water and maintain the 22 planters and 6 large troughs**. Without their commitment to on-going maintenance none of this would have been possible. You can see a fuller gallery of Thank Yous to our community volunteers here – <http://www.heavitreesquilometre.org/thank-you-gallery.html>



3) Fore Street "Then and Now" Heritage Plaques

The final Fore Street project has been to work in partnership with the Heavitree Local History Society using their research into the long trading heritage of Fore Street. **Ninety children from Ladysmith Junior School's Yr5** participated in workshops exploring that history and were invited to "adopt a shop" in groups of four and design a heritage plaque that celebrated its individual trading story.

Again, our fantastic Fore Street traders embraced the opportunity to forge links with the broader community and now proudly display their very own heritage plaques, designed specifically for them by local children.



OUR "THANK YOU" EVENT



To draw the project to a close and to give a HUGE THANK YOU to

- over 30 individual Fore Street traders
- to over 20 local volunteers including the Green Pod
- to **150 participating children(!) and to their teachers and families** for their help,
- to local community groups
- and to our councillors for releasing the Section 106 funds

we arranged a Thank You event to present Heavitree Champion awards.

The Co-op Group kindly allowed permission to use their car park and Tesco Express donated refreshments.

What the project has achieved

- Fore Street now proudly sports 30 brightly-coloured community flags that look amazing in the summer sunshine and represent direct links between the street and 60 Heavitree families.
- There are also 6 large troughs and 22 planters with pollinator friendly planting all being cared for by individual traders.
- There are 23 heritage plaques enhancing the window displays of participating traders and representing a further 90 direct links between the street and Heavitree families.
- Our local schools have embraced the opportunity to extract every ounce of place-based learning from the project engaging in workshops on graphic design, responsible transport, air quality, local history and the environmental importance of bees.

These are the tangible results but its clear that the project has been part of a great community resurgence and a real sense of re-generation on the street and we're thrilled to also add

- There is now a new Traders Association coming up with great community-involved plans for Christmas 2018 and beyond.
- There are far fewer empty units on Fore Street! And new traders there are actively contributing to a dynamic buzz.
- Traders are reporting that families are coming to visit them because of their connection through the project and they've been delighted to see groups of children coming to see the flags and actively engaged in planting.
- Local traders clubbed together to buy flowers for Heavitree *Squillometre* project co-ordinator JoJo Spinks, representing an appetite for continued local community group/trader links.

**IT'S TRUE TO SAY THAT FORE STREET, HEAVITREE IS ON THE UP AND UP
AND THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING**

The Fore Street project was co-ordinated by JoJo Spinks of the Heavitree *Squillometre*, arts-based community group under the governance of Interwoven Productions CIC, Place-Making specialists. Interwoven were commissioned by Exeter City Council using Section 106, developers' contribution, funding.

www.heavitreesquillometre.org
www.interwovenproductions.com