



Luton Irish Forum

PRESS RELEASE

Bushwood Gives Back

Luton Irish Forum [LIF] is a registered charity which serves the older and most vulnerable members of the Irish and other communities within and outside Luton. The organisation provides advice, information and practical help with the main aim of improving quality of life. It also promotes Irish culture and is a pioneer of community cohesion initiatives. Its activities and events which promote health and wellbeing, improve quality of life and increase social inclusion are accessed 30,000 times annually. LIF was one of the Mayor of Luton's nominated Charities for 2010/11 and was shortlisted for the Luton Best, Luton in Harmony Award 2010.

With the support of the Irish government and the Kathleen and Michael Connolly Foundation, LIF secured land from Luton Borough Council and built a fully accessible Centre which was formally opened in 2006. Since relocating, demand for services increased from the Irish and other Luton communities. Aided by disabled access, positive results and word of mouth, the centre reached capacity within 6 months of opening. Hence the Trustees set about raising capital funds to extend the centre. In May 2009, LIF was dismayed to learn that funding which was pledged was no longer forthcoming, due to the economic downturn. The future looked bleak: staff members and volunteers were working in cramped conditions in a portocabin, we could not fully accommodate their users and were at risk of losing the capital funds raised to date.

In June LIF approached another local sponsor The Bushwood Partnership. John and Steven Boyle, and Stephen Doyle are Local businessmen living in Luton and surrounding villages and are well known for their generosity in supporting local charities. The Bushwood Partnership had been aware of the extension plans and how close LIF was to having its agreed funding withdrawn. The Partnership have previously sponsored the LIF's St Patrick's Festival and agreed to help the charity realise its vital development. The difficulties been faced were very quickly resolved. Drawings were submitted to the Council, taking into account the neighbouring properties and detailed planning permission was successfully obtained. Previous funding from the Irish Government was kept in place and the substantial building shortfall of a six figure sum was personally committed by John Boyle.

LIF created the original concept through extensive consultation with its members and The Bushwood Partnership took over the direction of the project, consulting and involving LIF at every stage of the process. This unique charity and corporate partnership was supported by a number of stakeholders including the funders, Luton Borough Council and neighbours. The former Mayor, Councillor Tom Shaw even managed to locate catering equipment that has been included in our new kitchen!

After much time, energy, collaboration and commitment Luton now has an eco-friendly Centre which provides the local Irish and other communities with up-to-date facilities to

accommodate its welfare, social and cultural services. Such services which will be positively impacted include its welfare advice, computer and luncheon clubs, cultural programme and the opportunity to support the activities of local Minority Ethnic groups.

Tom Scanlon Public relations Officer of LIF said 'This fantastic building is a fitting tribute to the contribution made, and which continues to be made by Irish emigrants in shaping the modern Luton. The courage and vision shown by John Boyle and the Bushwood Partnership in committing time and substantial sums of money to provide the Irish in Luton with this modern eco building is all the more remarkable, given the difficult economic climate prevailing. All too often the words corporate responsibility is expressed but the generosity that the Irish Government and the Bushwood Partnership have shown is very rarely forthcoming. LIF trustees and members are very proud of their new building and grateful to the Irish government the Bushwood Partnership, Luton Borough Council, Local MPs and all those organisations and individuals who contributed to providing this iconic building. The trustees, staff and volunteers are committed to providing more and better services to the community in the years ahead without juggling limited space.'

Further information on the services provided by LIF, please contact Tom Scanlon (Public Relations Officer) on Tel: 01582 720447 or Email: info@lutonirishforum.org