

# A symbol of Peace, Hope and Unity in Harlesden



Kirit Wadia, The Mayor of Brent Cllr Arshad Mahmood, Rev. Leão Neto and Imam Abdullah planting apple trees for a brighter shared future in Harlesden.

On Sunday 30 September 2018, Brent residents from all faiths and none, came together to take part in a Peace Walk organised by The Brent Multi-Faith Forum. It is estimated that approximately 150 people took part in the walk starting at the Islamic Cultural Centre, (Wembley), and ending at the Harlesden Methodist Church, with two stops in between, at the Neasden Swaminarayan Temple and the Harlesden Town Garden. Three apple trees were planted at the Town Garden to commemorate the coming together of the faith communities within Harlesden, thanks to the Near Neighbours Church Urban Fund. The project (Harlesden Multi-Faith Network), brought together faith leaders and representatives from over 14 community groups and centres since April this year.

Four multi-faith meetings were held at the Islamic Cultural Centre (Wembley), Neasden Swaminarayan Temple, Harlesden Ummah Community Centre and Harlesden Methodist Church. Each of the faith centres opened their doors, extending hands of friendship and welcomed members from other faiths in an effort to promote faith cohesion and collaboration within the local neighbourhood. The Peace Walk and tree planting ceremony were testament to the strengthened bonds forged between the faith communities over the course of the project in Harlesden. Congregation members as well as whole families came out to take part in the event together.







Beginning the Peace Walk at the Islamic Cultural Centre (Wembley)

The Peace Walk commenced with an opportunity for the public to observe the Muslim congregational prayer at the mosque, led by Imam Abdullah. After the prayer, Rev. Leao, Chair of Brent Multi-Faith Forum, welcomed friends and community members taking part in this momentous event. The congregation and guests enjoyed a full traditional lunch together at the mosque, before the Mayor of Brent, Cllr Arshad Mahmood, cut the ribbon to signify the start of Peace Walk.

Young volunteers from the Islamic Cultural Centre (Wembley), stewarded the route, guiding and supporting walkers for the full duration of the event. Upon reaching the Neasden Temple, walkers were welcomed at the ceremonial gates by traditional drummers and volunteers, who tied symbolic threads onto the wrists of the faith leaders. The guests were then taken on a guided tour of the mandir, before being served drinks and refreshments.



Lunch at the mosque (top left) and entering the temple (top right)





Peace Walkers visiting the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden

At the tree planting ceremony, in which trees were donated by the Faiths Forum for London, faith leaders and the Leader of Brent Council, Cllr Muhammed Butt spoke of the significance of the tree planting. Rabbi Frank Dabba-Smith, Vice-Chair of Brent Multi Faith Forum, shared his sentiments of the trees as important for the future, for the children and grandchildren to enjoy for years to come.

Rev. Leão Neto, of Harlesden Methodist Church, referred to the Tree of Life in Christian traditions; which grows by the river, growing leaves for the healing of the nations. Rev. Leão said, "Today we are witnesses to that prophesy, that one day there will be a tree and out of it, there will be peace and harmony amongst the nations and the people".. 'and apples!', called out a member in the crowd.



Planting trees at the Harlesden Town Garden together



Imam Abdullah from the Islamic Cultural Centre (Wembley), explained that the planting of trees for Muslims has an element of Divine reward, as it is considered an act of *sadaqah* or charity, particularly when the intention behind it is to satisfy people and all of creation.

Kirit Wadia, from the Shri Swaminarayan Temple (Neasden), shared hopes and prayers that the trees “take deep root and their branches flow far and wide, and bear fruits for all of Brent to enjoy”.



Cllr Muhammed Butt speaking at the tree planting ceremony

“Planting these trees here today, is a symbol of peace, it’s a symbol of hope and it’s a symbol of unity”, concluded Cllr Muhammed Butt. He felt proud that today was a celebration of the diversity within Brent. “We are celebrating and recognising every single culture, every identity, every heritage we have in Brent and that’s the most important thing that we need to cherish and recognise”.



Willesden Pathfinder Club and Drum Corp, led the procession from the tree planting ceremony to the church.



Volunteers serving tea to Peace Walkers at the Harlesden Methodist Church



The faith communities of Harlesden hope to continue to work collectively and to build on the strengthened bonds that have been developed over the last six months. The Harlesden Multi-Faith Network will continue to meet at different faith venues in the area and already have plans to support a youth project specifically aimed at empowering the young people of Harlesden.

This project was facilitated by the Brent Multi Faith Forum and supported by Near Neighbours and The London Inter Faith Centre. With special thanks to The Harlesden Town Garden, Faiths Forum for London, The Islamic Cultural Centre (Wembley), and Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden, The Harlesden Methodist Church and Wilesden Pathfinder Club and Drum Corp.

