

## The Mayor's Visit to the Al Mahdi Centre Planting the seed of Friendship

On Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> March, the Al Mahdi Madrasah and the Muslim community of Fareham ( Wessex Jamaat) led by Sheikh Fazle Abbas Dattoo, the Imam /Resident Scholar had the honour of hosting the Mayor of Fareham Borough Council, Cllr Connie Hockley. She was accompanied by her consort Cllr Geoffrey Hockley, as well as the Leader of the Council, Cllr Sean Woodward. This first official visit by Fareham Borough Council to the centre provided an opportunity for children and teachers of the Madrasah- Saturday School- to meet and speak with the Mayor and Leader of the Council, and also for the guests to find out more about the local Muslim community and the activities and services that the centre provides to its congregation.



As a symbol of the strong relationship between Muslims and Christians in the area, Reverend Susan Allman, the Vicar of St. Peter's Church and Area Dean for Fareham, was also present as a host to welcome these distinguished guests to the centre. The support of the local Christian community is one that is greatly valued by the Al Mahdi Centre and its members and one that continues to grow and be a source of enrichment for both communities.

The visit began with the ceremonial planting of an apple tree in the scenic grounds of the Al Mahdi Centre, which spans a total of 5 beautifully landscaped acres. The Muslim community look forward to welcoming Mayor Connie, Cllr Geoffrey and Cllr Sean again to see the tree's progress and perhaps enjoy some delicious apples.



The tree-planting was followed by a tour of the grounds, led by the President Hasnain Nurmohamed, the Vice President Shabbir Walji and the Chairlady Mrs Shelina Moledina, alongside no less than three previous presidents and other longstanding members of the Al Mahdi Centre. The tour gave the guests a taste of the serene and spiritual atmosphere provided by the natural beauty of the grounds

and gave them a chance to view the children's play area, the herb garden and the centre's cultured exterior design, including an extensive CCTV security system.



The tour continued inside the centre, where the guests were informed about the various features of the Mosque and their religious significance, including the Mimbar (pulpit), the Mihrab (alcove facing the direction for prayer) and the beautiful models of important religious shrines around the world. The head of AV was also available to demonstrate the AV facilities within the centre as well as the tight security system that is in place as coordinated from the AV and security room. Guests were also informed about the Al Mahdi Centre's proud culture of environmental sustainability, as demonstrated through the various 'green' initiatives that were so central to the design of the centre, such as the use of geothermal heat and solar energy.

, After viewing some of the classes in session and mingling with the children during break time, a lovely meal was provided for the guests.. At this juncture the Mayor addressed the community members present to thank the Al Mahdi Centre for their hospitality and to extend a hand of support and friendship to the Muslim community. During these times of uncertainty, gestures such as this strengthen the relationships that we value so greatly and give us all pride to be associated with a British identity.



The final aspect of the visit reflected the final actions that we undergo in this world. This was a tour of the room in the centre in which funeral rituals are conducted. This provided an opportunity for the guests to find out more about the final rites in Islam and provide religious context to the Muslim requirements for quick burial following a death, an area in which Mayor Hockley herself has been and continues to be a great support to the Al Mahdi Centre.

The Al Mahdi Centre looks forward to welcoming the Mayor Connie Hockley, Cllr Geoffrey Hockley and Cllr Sean Woodward again in the future - perhaps to share an apple crumble together! We hope that, like the apple tree, the bond between the Al Mahdi Centre and the distinguished guests of Fareham Borough Council continues to grow and strengthen and become a source of pride and blessings for both the Muslim community and the local council.



Report compiled by Dr Mohamedabbas Jaffer