

Hastings Independent

263 25 OCTOBER 2024 THE **FREE** & INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR HASTINGS



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Your Pull Out
Guide to What
is Happening
in and Around
Hastings



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Owens Directors' £4m loss

HUGH SULLIVAN

Draft accounts of CFEC Ltd, the company which developed the Owens entertainment centre in the former Debenhams building in Robertson Street in 2022 and which filed for insolvency in August, have been released. Prepared by joint administrators Nicholas Simmonds and Chris Newell in the form of a Statement of Proposals to creditors, the accounts show that CFEC had unsecured losses exceeding £5.6m. Of that sum, the two directors of the company, which previously traded as C&O Entertainments Ltd, claim to have invested over £4.44m of their own money since its incorporation in June 2021.

Gregor Macrae is a creditor in the administration for nearly £334,000; co-director Lubov Chernukhin, former investment banker married to one-time Russian oligarch Vladimir

Chernukhin, is shown to be owed over £4.1m.

In a narrative summary, the administrators report that the enterprise, which involved full internal refurbishment of the building, had a budget of £2.25m (upped from an initial figure of £1.5m). It opened for business in October 2022, but the first management accounts drawn up only a month later showed that projected numbers regarding footfall and sales "were clearly impossible to achieve."

"External bad press did not help the situation, and the staff were threatened physically", the narrative adds.

Turnover for the year to September 2023 was calculated to be £862,221 but the "admin expenses" amounted to over £2.6m. The losses, funded by Mrs Chernukhin, accumulated monthly until closure.

The draft accounts list the only assets of the company at that point as £22,800 cash at the

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Sister Suzie: Honestly?



ADAM RHODES



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Despite its modest size, Hastings over-delivers when it comes to arts and music. Look inside HIP's latest issue for a snapshot of just some of the good things going on.

After SHE choir's triumphant first solo gig at the White Rock, another event to look forward to is Hastings Philharmonic Choir and Hastings Philharmonic Orchestra performing Haydn and Vivaldi. This autumn also sees the return of singer Sister Suzie and her band, and local favourites Fabulous Red Diesel - part of a line up celebrating Samhain. Details of all these gigs in the Arts section.

If the spoken word is more your bag, Hastings Comedy Festival kicks off its winter season with stand-up Angela Barnes, while Hastings Storytelling Festival has Inua Ellams, combining African cultural traditions with contemporary British theatre and poetry.

Following a financially straightened Mardi Gras in 2024, Fat Tuesday will be back to strength next year, bringing a colourful carnival to cold February days.

Elsewhere in the paper, sport doesn't have to be competitive, read about the local weekly Parkrun's 20th Anniversary, and our Community pages report on the relaunch of Sustenance, a vital food charity providing meals and preventing waste.

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News

1 bank plus £65,200 worth of office furniture, plant and equipment, none of which has yet been realised.

CHERNUKHIN RICHES
Mrs Chernukhin, born in Russia when it was still the centre of the Soviet Union but now a British citizen, can presumably afford her loss. In 2021 she was reported in the Guardian newspaper to have paid the Conservative party more than £2.1m in donations over the previous nine years. The press report also featured the Chernukhins' ownership of a superyacht plying the Mediterranean and Caribbean seas, a private jet registered in the Isle of Man and a £30m London townhouse overlooking Regents Park.

No source of Mrs Chernukhin's riches has ever been publicly disclosed, though the 'Pandora Papers' leaked by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists in 2021 revealed that she and her husband were involved in a network of offshore investments which have avoided investigative scrutiny. The draft accounts of CFEC state that initial funding for the Owens enterprise came from a British Virgin Islands company, Sunny Gulch, "on behalf of Mrs Chernukhin". Another £400,000 was provided controversially by the Hastings Town Deal Fund - £150,000 being received by the company, £250,000 by the freeholders of the building, Moxie Management Two Ltd (MM2).

Former founding director of the company, Graham Owen, claimed last year, after being ousted from the board in March 2023, that he had himself invested about £400,000 of his own. However, he is not shown as a creditor in these accounts.

TRADE & EXPENSE CREDITORS
Other major creditors are identified as Fear FX, manufacturer of 'scare

products' based in Bognor Regis, who are owed £278,000; MM2, who are owed £226,000; Hastings Building Services (HBS), the main building contractors on the site, who are shown as being owed two separate debts of £164,000 and £187,000; and Hastings Borough Council (HBC), who are named as creditors in respect of three separate sums - the £150,000 Town Deal "grant", a £2,512.50 "bid levy", and £49,235 (unspecified).

Chris Dodwell, director of HBS, says that the debt owed to his company has been double-counted in error. In September 2023, when Owens closed its doors, suggesting at the time it would be a temporary shutdown, he claimed the amount owed was £157,000.

As to the HBC debts, it's not clear why the Town Deal figure should be treated as a repayable sum, though it's an academic question only: there seems no possibility of any creditors receiving a dividend after the administrators have paid themselves from the limited assets recovered. The unspecified sum of £49,235 may be unpaid rates.

FREEHOLDERS SEEK NEW TENANTS
The directors of MM2, the property company which bought the freehold of the Debenhams building and are now looking for fresh tenants, have issued a press release.

In it, director Bella Landen said: "Owens Entertainment promised so much, but failed to deliver the quality leisure offering expected. We tried to work with Owens parent company CFEC Ltd to resurrect their leisure business and were deeply disappointed when they decided to go into administration in August 2024."

Co-director Sophie Hubble, however, has accentuated the positives: "We've invested a considerable amount in improving the infrastructure. Ultimately, this

means that the building is better positioned to meet the needs of a wider variety of tenants. Also, Moxie is not a huge conglomerate, which means that we can be more flexible in our approach, and quicker to act."

Ms Landen added: "This also means that we are better placed to engage with the local community. We've already built, and will continue to build, strong and invaluable links. We are currently in talks with a local arts organisation and Love

Hastings, to decorate the security boarding outside the building - which has been put up to protect the windows while it remains unoccupied."

The property will be going to market through local commercial agents Dyer & Hobbis. "Our aim", said Ms Hubble, "is to partner with a tenant or tenants who share our passion for Hastings and will deliver a mix of uses that enrich the town, making it a site that we can all say we are truly proud of."

SITE NOTICE FOR APPLICATION FOR A PREMISES LICENCE

This notice is to advise that on the 19th day of October 2024 an application for the grant of a variation of a Premises Licence was made to Hastings Borough Council for the premises known as Unit 2, 8-9 Harold Place, Hastings, TN34 1JA

Was made by: Samantha Higgins

For the following licensable activities or proposed variation- Regulated Entertainment e) Live Music, f) Recorded Music, g) Performance of Dance 11:00 to 01:00 Sunday to Thursday, 11:00 to 02:00 Friday, Saturday and an additional hour to the standard & non-standard

times on the day when British summertime commences. On days preceding a Public Holiday, Saturday hours will apply. New Years Eve until 02:00 Sale of Alcohol by Retail (on the premises) 11:00 to 01:00, Sunday to Thursday. 11:00 to 01:30 Friday, Saturday and an additional hour to the standard & non-standard times on the day when British summertime commences. On days preceding a Public Holiday, Saturday hours will apply. New Years Eve until 02:00

Any person wishing to make representations about this application should write to Hastings Borough Council, Head of Environment & Place, Muriel

Matters House, Breeds Place, Hastings, TN34 3UY, or email Licensing@hastings.gov.uk within twenty eight consecutive days from the date of the application shown above.

The application can be viewed by pre-arranged appointment at our offices, during office hours. It is an offence knowingly or recklessly to make a false statement in connection with an application & a person is liable to a fine of up to a maximum of £5,000 on summary conviction for the offence.

Dated this 19th day of October 2024

SITE NOTICE FOR APPLICATION FOR A PREMISES LICENCE

This notice is to advise that on the 19th day of October 2024 an application for the grant of a variation of a Premises Licence was made to Hastings Borough Council for the premises known as Bubba's Lounge, 8-9 Harold Place, Hastings, TN34 1JA

Was made by: Samantha Higgins

For the following licensable activities or proposed variation- Regulated Entertainment e) Live Music, f) Recorded Music, g) 08:00 to 23:00, New Year's Eve until 02:00

Late Night Refreshment 23:00 to 23:30 New Year's Eve until 02:00 Sale of Alcohol by Retail (on the premises) 10:00 to 23:30, An additional hour to the standard & non-standard times on the day when British summertime commences. New Year's Eve until 02:00

Any person wishing to make representations about this application should write to Hastings Borough Council, Head of Environment & Place, Muriel Matters House, Breeds Place, Hastings, TN34 3UY, or email Licensing@hastings.gov.uk

within twenty eight consecutive days from the date of the application shown above.

The application can be viewed by pre-arranged appointment at our offices, during office hours. It is an offence knowingly or recklessly to make a false statement in connection with an application & a person is liable to a fine of up to a maximum of £5,000 on summary conviction for the offence.

Dated this 19th day of October 2024

SITE NOTICE FOR APPLICATION FOR A PREMISES LICENCE

This notice is to advise that on the 19th day of October 2024 an application for the grant of a variation of a Premises Licence was made to Hastings Borough Council for the premises known as UK Off Licence, 88 Queens Road, Hastings, TN34 1RL

Was made by: Samantha Higgins

For the following licensable activities or proposed variation- Sale of Alcohol by Retail (off the premises) 10:00 to

05:00 Monday to Sunday apply to extend the hours for the off sale of alcohol through a delivery service between the hours of 22:00 and 05:00 Opening Hours 09:00 to 00:00 Monday to Sunday

Any person wishing to make representations about this application should write to Hastings Borough Council, Head of Environment & Place, Muriel Matters House, Breeds Place, Hastings, TN34 3UY, or email Licensing@hastings.gov.uk within twenty eight consecutive

days from the date of the application shown above.

The application can be viewed by pre-arranged appointment at our offices, during office hours. It is an offence knowingly or recklessly to make a false statement in connection with an application & a person is liable to a fine of up to a maximum of £5,000 on summary conviction for the offence.

Dated this 19th day of October 2024

HASTINGS TIDES

DATE	HIGH AND LOW TIDES			SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON
FRI 25 OCT (BST)	H 5:25am	L 12:25pm	H 6:23pm	7:38	5:44	
SAT 26 OCT (BST)	L 1:20am	H 6:57am	L 2:04pm	H 8:06pm	7:39	5:42
CLOCKS CHANGE BACK TO GMT						
SUN 27 OCT (BST)	L 1:51am	H 7:22am	L 2:24pm	H 8:12pm	6:41	4:40
MON 28 OCT	L 2:55am	H 8:21am	L 3:18pm	H 8:59pm	6:43	4:38
TUES 29 OCT	L 3:42am	H 9:05am	L 4:01pm	H 9:36pm	6:45	4:36
WEDS 30 OCT	L 4:21am	H 9:43am	L 4:37pm	H 10:08pm	6:46	4:35
THURS 31 OCT	L 4:53am	H 10:17am	L 5:08pm	H 10:37pm	6:48	4:33
FRI 1 NOV	L 5:22am	H 10:48am	L 5:40pm	H 11:04pm	6:50	4:31
SAT 2 NOV	L 5:54am	H 11:15am	L 6:11pm	H 11:30pm	6:51	4:29
SUN 3 NOV	L 6:26am	H 11:40am	L 6:43pm	H 11:56pm	6:53	4:28
MON 4 NOV	L 6:58am	H 12:06am	L 7:14pm		6:56	4:26
TUES 5 NOV	H 0:24am	L 7:29am	H 12:34pm	L 7:43pm	6:57	4:24
WEDS 6 NOV	H 0:57am	L 8:01am	H 1:09pm	L 8:16pm	6:58	4:23
THURS 7 NOV	H 1:35am	L 8:37am	H 1:52pm	L 8:56pm	7:00	4:21

* L= LOW TIDE H = HIGHTIDE For beach safety advice visit: rnli.org/safety/beach-safety

Dine & Dash Heroes

PAUL MCLAUGHLIN

Diners at the popular La Bella Vista restaurant in Grand Parade, St Leonards, last Saturday evening (12 October) witnessed a violent attack which resulted in extensive damage to the premises and left some staff battered and bruised.

The incident happened when a couple refused to pay their bill. When challenged by restaurant owner Aldo Esposito, there was a violent confrontation. Tables were overturned and plates and glasses were broken. The main glass door was also kicked in leaving shards of glass strewn across the floor and on the pavement outside.

The couple left the building but returned to inflict further damage. After numerous phone calls from staff and other guests caught up in the commotion, it took 25 minutes for the police to arrive, and order was restored.

Mr Esposito suffered a dislocated finger and was left with a series of

cuts and bruises to his face. Restaurant manager, Kat Cmokova, and Hamish Mowat, a new member of the staff, both suffered similar cuts and bruises in heroically protecting diners from the turmoil.

Sussex Police arrested a 39-year-old woman from Crawley on suspicion of causing criminal damage and common assault. She has since been bailed. Officers are still trying to identify the second suspect with the aid of the restaurant's extensive CCTV system.

The incident is the latest in what is becoming known as "dine and dash" robberies, where guests enjoy a meal with drinks and then leave before paying their bills. Across the country it is estimated that one in 20 people have walked out of a restaurant without paying.

Dine and dash incidents are becoming more frequent. Mr Esposito has experienced four cases in the last 12 months, and he knows of other restaurant owners in the area who have endured similar ordeals. He indicated that there is a common pattern used by diners to avoid paying



Local Heroes: Kate Cmokova and Aldo Esposito

their bills. In addition to the more common dine and dash, where guests eat their meal and then scarpers without paying, Mr Esposito says there are two other approaches. The first involves food allergies. When diners are asked when ordering their food if they have any allergies, they later claim they had not understood that their meal would include an ingre-

dient to which one of the party was allergic. The second approach involves planting a non-food item in their meal and then complaining about hygiene standards in the kitchen. In both types of cases, the guests refuse to pay their bills, leaving the restaurants to pick up the often hefty tabs because the police are reluctant to intervene on the grounds that it is

a civil and not a criminal matter. Mr Esposito is setting up a WhatsApp group of local restaurant and café owners to warn each other of any potential threats and to share information about known dine and dash individuals.

Anyone who witnessed the incident is urged to contact Sussex Police.

A landslide for local democracy?

Residents' perspectives on the Old Roar Gill landslip

DR RALITSA HITEVA

Last Wednesday evening (16 October), residents affected by the landslide at the Old Roar Gill (ORG) in February gathered in Muriel Matters House for an Extraordinary General Meeting of Hastings Borough Council (HBC) to discuss three options for the next steps in dealing with the consequences of the landslide.

Option 1 involved HBC paying for further investigations into the cause of the landslide on HBC-owned land only. Option 2 involved widening the scope of the investigation to include other privately owned land and to share the costs of this work with the affected residents. Option 3 was essentially to do nothing.

ORG residents were not consulted with or involved in the design of the three options. In fact, despite repeated questions about how the

options were determined, HBC's only response was to say they were designed based on the findings of an insurance report which was completed in April. The report, based mostly on desk-based research and a brief site visit, did not seek to establish liability, but instead discussed potential contributing factors and recommended a suite of further investigations to understand the full scope and scale of the cause and potential repair.

We raised concerns about the lack of engagement and the design and description of the three options in a letter sent to all councillors. We also pointed out that Option 2 listed pros which would also be true for Option 1. We were told that this was due to human error and that councillors would be briefed about the potential pros. The Council had over five weeks to correct the report it sent to councillors, but did not do so.

The most worrying thing for all of us was that we were not given

any details of the proposed work or costs under Option 2, even though HBC has already selected Coffey Geotechnics to carry out this work. For us, Option 2 seemed as unrealistic as Option 3.

Around 20 residents turned up to the first part of the meeting, whilst many more watched online. This part of the meeting was streamed online and allowed the public to be present, without being able to participate in the discussion. The second part of the meeting was behind closed doors and included discussion of financial and legal issues and the vote.

It turns out that democracy in practice is a short, edited affair. The first part of the meeting lasted a little over 22 minutes with a handful of questions from councillors and two senior HBC officials misrepresenting the truth. The Chief Legal Officer denied that the landslide was on HBC-owned land stating that "the lower part of the Old Roar Gill, the ecological area, that's on the bottom, where the waterfall and everything else is, is owned by the Council. The actual area of the collapse is owned by the respective residents who live on that slope."

This statement goes against Land Registry information and HBC's own webpage. The landslide affected land in the HBC-owned Gill, a public path for which East Sussex CC is responsible, and which stood between the Gill and the private residents' homes and several properties at the top. It is hard to comprehend what the purpose is of making such a

statement, apart from yet another attempt to distance the Council from the landslide.

This was followed by a statement from HBC's Head of Strategic Programmes who stated that discussions about Option 2 have already taken place with residents and "that they would be engaged in any design." This could not be further from the truth. HBC themselves confirmed this when denying a freedom of information request under the Environmental Information Regulations to provide the cost and scope of work documents for Coffey Geotechnics. They stated, "the requested information has not been shared with the affected residents, therefore, unfair to release into the public domain."

At this point some of us walked out of the meeting.

It is difficult to find the right words to describe how, we, the residents, felt after the meeting. Two words could be heard muttered the most by the small crowd gathered in the lobby of the council building: "cruel" and "shameful." If this part of the footage had not been edited out by the Council, people watching the recording of Part 1 could have heard them too.

The way HBC is dealing with the ORG residents and the landslide is much bigger than the shifting earth mass and empty homes around the Gill. It gives a glimpse into a local authority desperate to bend the truth and unwilling to stand with residents and communities in the face of this disaster.

CORRECTIONS

EGGTOOTH AND ORE LIBRARY

HIP 262 carried a news report headlined Eggtooth Faces Closure. This was inaccurate. The Eggtooth Project, which has taken mental health referrals from local GPs over the past three years, has had its NHS funding withdrawn since 27 September. However, it will continue to offer services to private individuals and through schools.

In HIP 262 a community report headed Ore Library: Open & Thriving ascribed to Hastings Borough Council the decision to close the library in 2019. This was wrong. The decision was made by East Sussex County Council as the responsible local authority.

We apologise for these errors.

NOTICE

The Registrar General has cancelled the registrations of Alexandra Chapel, Sedlescombe Road North, Silverhall, St Leonards-on-Sea; Emmanuel Church, Greenfield Road, Eastbourne and St Leonards Congregational Church, London Road, St Leonards-on-Sea as a place of religious worship in accordance with the Marriage Act 1949.

A Jones for the Registrar General
October 2024



Angela Harris, Trevor Webb and Anyme Abdallah

Adult Social Care is not a Luxury

PAUL MCLAUGHLIN

The Leader of East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has issued a stark warning to local residents to expect some deeply unpopular cuts to adult social care services next year as a result of a £55 million funding gap in the Council's finances. Keith Glazier, the Conservative Leader of the Council, said the financial black hole will make it "almost impossible to maintain current levels of service provision" in 2025 and that ESCC will have to make some "extremely difficult choices" to a range of key services.

The Council Leader's comments followed the launch of a series of 11 consultations to gauge public opinion on the potential impact of anticipated funding cuts to adult social care services. These include day services, community support, employment training for people with learning disabilities, supported accommodation, housing support services and drug and alcohol recovery.

Cllr Glazier explained that the costs of providing these services had almost doubled in just three years. This has been due to a combination of factors, primarily the increasing complexity of need and pressures arising from demand and demo-

graphic growth returning to pre-pandemic levels. Given this level of costs increase, he said ESCC "could not continue to deliver services in the way we have been."

Last year the Council spent £239.46 million on delivering adult social care services. This equates to 48% of its entire budget and, along with children services, which accounts for 30% of total spending, means there is very little scope for making real savings without taking what are likely to be some very unpopular decisions.

The savings proposals are likely to include the closure of two-day services for older people and two-day centres, community support services and Steps to Work training for people with learning disabilities. There are also proposals to stop on-site support in supported accommodation for vulnerable adults and adults with mental health needs, significantly reducing funding for housing-related support services, and not renewing contracts for drug and alcohol recovery services.

Cllr Glazier acknowledged the importance of the services offered to support vulnerable people and said the Council specifically wanted to hear how individuals and communities could be affected by any potential changes to service levels. He also gave a commitment that

ESCC "would continue to help everyone entitled to support under the Care Act, which is a legal duty for all councils" and that "no decisions have been made at this time and that all those who are entitled to support will continue to receive help."

In addition to cuts to the adult social care budget, ESCC is also expected to reduce staffing numbers, cut office space and increase charges for paid-for services, such as residents parking permits. Cllr Glazier indicated, however, that these measures in themselves would not be sufficient to close the funding gap and he called on the new Labour Government to bail them out of the financial mess by delivering a "fairer and more sustainable deal for East Sussex that recognises the unique challenges we face as a county."

Labour's Trevor Webb, who represents the Central St Leonards and Gensing ward on ESCC, condemned the Council Leader's comments. He urged all residents to take part in the consultation and to send ESCC a "clear message about the importance of maintaining properly funded adult social care services." He said adult social care was not a "luxury" but "a vital necessity" and that any reduction in help and support to those in need "would mean more vulnerable people being deprived of help with their cooking, washing, dressing, and getting out of bed and denied the support they need to maintain and improve their independence." Such services were desperately needed, he added, to "help vulnerable people maintain their independence, well-being and dignity, and to live the lives they want in their own homes and in their local community." He warned that any cuts to budgets "would also have a detrimental impact on those caring for an adult family member or friend and would inevitably result in an increase in mental health issues and substance abuse problems.

The consultations will run until 28 November with decisions expected to be made on the proposals in February 2025.

Details about the consultations can be found at consultation.eastsussex.gov.uk

GOOD NEWS IN BRIEF

24-HOUR PARKING RETURNS AT PRIORY MEADOW

The car park at Priory Meadow Shopping Centre has returned to 24-hour opening. The 1066 space car park in Hastings town centre has been operating on reduced opening hours since the flood last year.

Andrew Harvey, Centre Manager, welcomed the return of 24-hour opening of the car park saying he was "extremely pleased" to have it back open on full operating hours in time for the run-up to Christmas.

The car park operates a ticketless system using ANPR technology and is one of the most competitively priced and largest in the town. It is also a secure, well-lit car park with dedicated disabled spaces, and wide bays for parents with children and babies on most levels.

ORDER OF 1066 AWARD

The Mayor of Hastings, Cllr Judy Rogers, has presented Reg Wood with this year's Order of 1066 Award. The honour is given by the town in recognition of exceptional service to Hastings. It is decided by a panel, chaired by the Mayor.

This year's winner was chosen in appreciation of the important role he has played in the local community and involvement in events dating back to 1976, when he was chosen to represent Hastings during a visit to Schwerte, Germany. It was this visit that led Hastings to being twinned with Schwerte.

Cllr Rogers said Reg was a "very deserving winner" of the award, and "does so much behind the scenes to make sure our local events run smoothly." In addition to being chairman of the town twinning group, he also plays a key part in Hastings Borough Bonfire Society, Hastings Week, Hastings Old Town Carnival, and Hastings Winkle Club.

BEST SMALL MUSEUM PROJECT AWARD

Hastings Museum & Art Gallery has been shortlisted for the Best Small Museum Project Award at the Museums Change Lives Awards 2024. The nomination is for their collab-

oration with The Refugee Buddy Project on the exhibition 'Illuminating Invisible Histories: Flavours Without Borders'.

The exhibition was a large collaborative project that began with a dinner party, which aimed to make stories of migration to Hastings visible. Guests at the dinner shared stories of migration and seeking refuge through objects with personal meaning to them. These stories and objects were then featured in an exhibition over the summer at Hastings Museum. This enabled visitors to discover more about the diverse culture of Hastings and explore the significant objects on display.

Rossana Leal, CEO of The Refugee Buddy Project, said the exhibition "brought to life seldom told stories of the various communities which make Hastings the magical place we live in."

This year's awards will take place in Leeds on Tuesday 12 November 2024, as part of the Museums Association's annual conference.

CELEBRATION AT THE HASTINGS ARMS

Twin sisters Susan Stoten and Hazel Sturmer have celebrated two decades of running the Hastings Arms on George Street. The pair took on the historic 18th century pub in the Old Town, back in 2004.

The sisters grew up in Hastings, with their parents, sister Heather and brother Gareth, and Susan attended Hastings College, so they were familiar with the area. Over the last 20 years, they have put their own unique stamp on the pub, building an excellent reputation for their well-kept cask ales, along with their delicious menu of homemade pub classics, including the popular Tuesday Curry Nights and Tapas Thursdays.

To mark the occasion, Shepherd Neame's Chief Executive Jonathan Neame visited the pub to celebrate their 20th anniversary and to thank them for their dedication and hard work over the past two decades. He also presented them with a commemorative plaque and magnum of Champagne.

Town Deal boost for Hastings Commons

PAUL MCLAUGHLIN

Hastings BC has awarded the £1m Towns Fund grant for the Town Living Project funding to Hastings Commons, to support the delivery of 12 affordable, sustainable and energy efficient homes within the Observer Building in Hastings town centre.

The project will repurpose 765 sqm of previously derelict floor space on the second and third floors of the Observer Building. There will be eleven 1-bedroom homes and one 2-bedroom home. These will be provided for those in severe housing need with rents set at the lower end of Hastings Living Rents (1/3 of local median wages) or at 80% of market rent.

Eight of the homes will be for

Hastings BC nominations to reduce the need for temporary accommodation and completion is due by March 2026. Residents will be selected from the Council's Housing Register using the same criteria as those who live next door in Rock House. The criteria are based on housing need, local connection, enthusiasm for the Hastings Commons' ethos and a willingness to contribute to the Commons and the wider community.

The £1m funding had originally been ring fenced for the refurbishment of a heritage property in Wellington Square, but plans were revised due to various risks associated with the listed building, including

financial, suitability and future management of the building. HBC has been considering how to deliver the project given its restricted finances.

However, there has been some criticism of the award of the grant, given that Dr Jess Steele, the CEO of Hastings Commons, sits on the Town Deal Board and is part-owner of the Observer Building. Local businessman, Philip Oakley, said the "allocation of £1m to achieve a 20% rental discount on a few flats did not make a lot of financial sense. The Observer Building has already received £5m of Town Deal money from a pot that was meant to help regenerate the whole of Hastings, but which has been spent in this one

small area of the Town."

Hastings BC confirmed that "Jess Steele is a member of the Town Deal Board, but not involved in the decision process for this project and not a member of the Town Investment Panel. The decision was taken by the Town Investment Panel, which has delegated authority from the Board to make decisions."

Despite the concerns, Cllr Glenn Haffenden, Hastings BC lead councillor for Housing and Wellbeing, and Graham Peters, the Chair of the Town Deal Board, were agreed that the £1m funding would be used to deliver much-needed affordable, energy efficient homes within the town centre.

Protesting and Picketing

ROD WEBB

Early on Wednesday morning, 16 October, peace activists picketed the entrance to the site of weapons manufacturer General Dynamics in Sidney Little Road to protest the latest Israeli atrocities in Gaza and Lebanon. In particular, it bore witness to the shocking killing of Sha'ban Al-Dalou, burnt to death in his hospital bed in the Israeli air strike on Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital early on the previous Monday morning. At least four people were killed, including his mother, and 70 were injured. Sha'ban, a software engineering student, had recently survived a strike on a mosque in which 20 Palestinians were killed and was recovering in hospital when he was killed.

This protest came only two weeks after a major protest – highlighting one year of genocide and bloodshed – outside the Castleham Road site of the company where a 'die in' was staged in the empty company car park. It was empty because the protesters normally give prior warning, and, as a result, company work-

ers stay at home. This disruption has been claimed as a small but important victory.

General Dynamics has been under sustained pressure from peace activists since Israel began its assault on Gaza one year ago. They have been at the two factories in Hastings ten times in the past year, even camping there over one weekend, and say they will keep up the campaign while General Dynamics weapons and technology is being used against Palestinians and now Lebanese civilians.

So to the sound of Low Key, the British-Iraqi rapper, 17 protesters, including one mother and toddler, blocked the entrance to the company car park. This was a symbolic gesture as there were alternative ways in and places to park. But it was cheering to see cars turning round or swiftly altering course: cheering since any change of direction can help pierce the bubble of normality in the deadly business of manufacturing weapons of war.

Throughout the protest, demonstrators created a written record in chalk to commemorate Sha'ban which read: "Sha'ban Al-Dalou: 19 years old; burned alive on an IVF



drip; displaced 5 times. It's ironic that the shocking death of this 19-year-old civilian received no attention in the mainstream media, while the four 19-year-old Israeli IDF soldiers recently killed in the line of duty by a Hezbollah strike were given widespread and detailed coverage.

The protest was also an opportunity to remind those attending the protest of the upcoming court case for Chris Dindar on Wednesday 23 October at Hastings Magistrates Court. Chris was charged with criminal damage while attempting to expose the fact that Sabra Houmous – available in major supermarkets

in Hastings – is partly-owned by the Israeli Strauss food company, and is a major donor to the Israeli Defence Force.

As HDPSC Chair Katy Colley pointed out, following the recent ruling of the International Court of Justice and a resolution passed in the UN General Assembly in September, all member states were now committed to ensuring the end of

the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands within 12 months, obligated not to 'aid or assist' in maintaining the occupation.

"That means it is not just our moral duty to boycott apartheid Israel, but a legal one too," she said. "In highlighting that Strauss funds the occupation forces, Chris was doing his legal duty to uphold international law!"

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

✉#Letter

ASBESTOS IN BROOMGROVE

Dear HIP

How very welcome the paediatric service will be to Broomgrove (*Paediatric GP Service for Broomgrove* in HIP 261), if only two days weekly. We've needed a full time GP surgery here for many, many years, but paediatrics is a start. We waited donkey's years for the pharmacy/chemist which got approval five years ago - and a very welcome service too.

After much thought, is it really any wonder Broomgrove has health problems? In May 2000 we suffered the huge power station arson fire and had asbestos in lumps, ash and dust raining down on our Broomgrove like a snow storm. We were warned to keep doors and

windows shut and to not go out. The next day a group in white zoot suits, gloves, masks plus bags came to pick asbestos up. Ash and dust couldn't be, so were left on the soil, grass etc. A warning of future health problems was made. I still have photos and paperwork relating to this in my archives somewhere.

Also we on Broomgrove have overhead National Grid electric cables that give out health hazard emissions; they hum and, when air is damp, click-click and light up like Xmas trees.

Cllr Turner must remember if he, as now, lived in the Linley Drive area, long before his council tenure. And here we are in 2024 still clearing up the mess of 24 years ago and will for many more. I've lived on Broomgrove since 1968 and still do.

Mrs Marilyn Sherwood

✉#From our website

DON'T TOLERATE INTOLERANCE

In response to *Throw the Fascists in the Sea* (HIP 261), whilst yes, I agree we must not become the monsters we hate through our hatred of the monsters, the only way to deal with intolerance is through intolerance of the intolerance. This means it is our responsibility and obligation to be 100% opposed to fascism in our life, and ultimately that will be ugly at times when peace is not an option.

This feels very much like a 'both sides are bad' argument, but personally I'm completely fine with throwing the groups who want to deny basic human rights straight in the sea.

George Prince

We would love to hear from you.

✉ letters@hastingsindependentpress.co.uk

📘 facebook.com/hastingsindependent

📷 instagram.com/hastingsindependent

Please be aware we may need to edit letters for reasons of space and we will only withhold names if this is necessary for the protection of the writer

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HASTINGS LIBRARY

Tuesday 5 & Tuesday 19 November, 10am to 12pm

COMMUNITY INFO HUB AT HASTINGS TOWN HALL

Every Thursday in November, 10am to 12pm

KARMABANK COMMUNITY KITCHEN, CONCORDIA HALL, ST LEONARDS

Thursday 7 November & Thursday 14 November, 12.30pm to 2.30pm

HASTINGS FOOD BANK AT THE HASTINGS CENTRE

Friday 1st & Friday 29 November 10.30am to 12.30pm

Or call us on 01424 390062 (local rates) or email hello@energisesussexcoast.co.uk

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WOH!

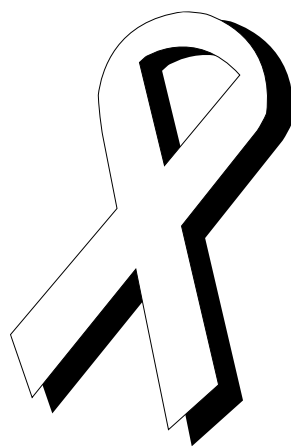
womenofhastings@gmail.com

A regular space to bring ideas and reflections. We discuss and write together to create awareness & encourage positive change for women and girls.

Violence Against Women – A Men's Issue

Monday 25 November is White Ribbon Day: 'It starts with men.'

Promise to never commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women.



thank you for your support

WHITE RIBBON
END MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In December 1989, in Montreal, Canada, Marc Lepine entered Ecole Polytechnique, with an automatic rifle. He told the men to leave, held nine women at gunpoint and yelled: "I hate feminists." He didn't know the women; they were all young female engineering students – not active feminists. He shot all nine women, then went into other classrooms and shot another five women before he turned the gun on himself.

In all, 14 women died and another 10 were injured in what is now regarded as Canada's first misogynist act of terrorism, a chilling example of the wider social violence against women everywhere.

Male survivors were asked why they 'abandoned' the women: why they didn't distract or attempt to stop the gunman when it was clear he was about to shoot them. Mark Steyn, (author and TV presenter) suggested that male inaction illustrated a 'culture of passivity' among men regarding women's issues. This led to a group of men in London, Ontario launching the White Ribbon Campaign in 1991. Their aim was to engage men in the prevention of gen-

der-based violence and encourage men and boys to be part of the solution.

Fast forward 33 years and the campaign has spread to over 60 countries. The white ribbon emblem was chosen to represent men giving up their weapons and seeking to promote healthy relationships, gender equity and a compassionate vision of masculinity. The White Ribbon movement promotes the idea that men should become allies of women, to take responsibility for challenging violence against women and preventing its occurrence.

Despite these efforts, violence towards women and girls remains a serious problem in our society. Written evidence from the Trade Unions Congress, 2023, stated: "Three in five women have experienced sexual harassment, bullying or verbal abuse in the workplace." This corresponds with the individual experiences within our Women of Hastings group, many of whom have shared accounts of sexual violence, intimidation and coercion either as children or adults: at work, in the community or at home.

That the issue of male violence is a male issue is clear – men and boys cannot simply be bystanders. In Hastings there are several men's groups, and we support and celebrate their conscious actions to stop male violence against women. We hope that they will organise a men-only parade or gathering in Alexandra Park for White Ribbon Day to raise awareness and demonstrate their active support to stop violence against women.

Hastings Borough Council has been given White Ribbon Accreditation by the White Ribbon UK charity until 2027. It is supporting White Ribbon Day in November and for the last few years has joined in with 16 Days of Action on social media as part of the Safer Hastings and Rother Partnerships to raise awareness of domestic abuse and the support available.

The Hastings, 'Let's do Business' group are supporting this event and several men's groups in Hastings have expressed interest in taking a stand on 25 November. We'll be reporting on further developments in our next issue.

In our recent article, *Where Ends Find New Beginnings*, we omitted to mention where to find Nomad. Rather than wandering the streets of the town, it is in fact located at 16 Silchester Road, St Leonards, TN38 0JB and its new website can be found at nomadslt.com

A Mighty Roar

On Thursday 10 October Hastings SHE Choir staged its first solo gig: Thunder, Lightning and Dirt, at the White Rock Theatre. FIONA MCGARRY went along to experience the power of the storm.



SHANNON PAJOT

SHE Choir describes itself as "A collaborative, un-auditioned, community choir for women, non-binary & gender queer folks". It is currently part of a network of SHE choirs (SHE stands for the initials of founder members Susie, Hannah and Ellie of the original choir in Manchester) but is planning to break out and change its name shortly.

My curiosity was piqued when I arrived at the White Rock Theatre studio and read the sign warning that 'Tonight's performance includes haze, fast flashing lights and pyros'. I was suddenly uncertain about listening to a choir for two hours, envisioning aggressive songs like Ozzy Osbourne's *Lightning Strikes* or Motorhead's *Thunder and Lightning*.

So, it was a relief when the choir appeared, buoyant and smiling in silver, black and even gold sequined outfits and sang an uplifting but melodic acappella number: *I know a place [where everyone's gonna lay down their weapon]*. This set the scene for an evening of original arrangements of rock, pop indie, folk and even blues – with some trailblazing protest songs. The only discordant note was a squeal from the sound system during the first number.

The evening was unexpectedly moving: you could sense the atmosphere grow more electric as the choir became more confident, negotiating songs like *Unwritten* by Natasha Bedingfield, through Regina Spektor's *Lady*, to *Shooting Stars* by Rival Sons. There was a palpable sense of community and camaraderie amongst the choir and the audience: it was fascinating to hear

the different styles and feel the contrasting energies as different members took turns to lead the choir and to explain the songs.

Some of the most haunting moments involved polished solo performances showcasing the talents of Tyger Mylk, Eleanor Westbrook, Charlie Austen, Carol Prior, Megan Leigh Mason and more – plus poetry from Yellow and Green, who captivated the audience with an impassioned plea to save the earth. At the end of the concert, a more punk tempo was introduced with the band Wave Machine singing *Tonic*.

Themes of love, tolerance and respect for our world and all the people in it, ran through the evening. Donna Canale sang a haunting lullaby for her children and grandchildren: *Waltz for the Girls*, and Charlie Austen gave us *Saved* – a song addressing homophobic hatred encountered at Pride marches.

But the song that resonated most with me in our current troubled times was *Resilient*, originally by Rising Appalachia. It gave the event its title and, according to the choir, is about "the resilient power of community to 'negate the chaos', as well as our rooted connection to nature and the world around us".

'I'm made of thunder
I'm made of lightning
I'm made of dirt ...

My voice feels tiny and I'm sure so does yours
But put us all together and we make a mighty roar'

Mighty – but also melodious.



GEORGINA PIER

Nomad Has a Home

COMMUNITY NEWS AND EVENTS

FUNDS FOR RURAL ROTHER

Friends Altogether in Rother (FAiR) delivers services to communities in rural Rother and has announced that they have recently been awarded £19,900 by The National Lottery Community fund. FAiR's mission is to reduce isolation and loneliness through providing community engagement opportunities.

The award means their services can remain free for service users and will allow them to continue their monthly *Tilling, Tea & Cake* meetings and develop their new Companionship Calls telephone befriending service over the next 12 months.

At their most recent meeting, 34 participants heard about the opportunities to be enjoyed by joining U3A and also listened to Jeff Penfold speaking about the wonderful 'Charity For Kids'. Five attendees received hand massages provided by volunteers from A Touch of Gentleness who support the group's events.

The next event is on Saturday 16 November 10-12pm at Tilling Green Community Centre. Check the FAiR Facebook, Instagram and Next Door pages for regular news and updates.

A CHANCE TO REMEMBER LOVED ONES

St Michael's Hospice offers a chance to remember those we miss at their annual remembrance celebrations, *Lights of Love* in December. The events are open to the whole community to attend and provide an opportunity for those who have lost someone to spend time with others who are experiencing similar feelings at this time of year.

You are invited to decorate a personal star dedication for one of the *Lights of Love* trees at the venue of your choice. The stars can be picked up from any of the Hospice shops, over the phone on 01424 453696, or requested online at stmichaelshospice.com/event/lights

Tree lighting ceremonies will take place directly after each celebration, followed by refreshments and mince pies.

Cheryl, who attends *Lights of Love* every year with her family, says: "I've been attending Lights of Love since we lost our beautiful mum. It's another way of keeping her memory alive and it is comforting knowing people are there for the same reason."



Lights of Love celebrations will take place between 1-8 December at venues in Battle, Bexhill on Sea, Hastings, St Leonards on Sea, and Rye. For more information go to stmichaelshospice.com/event/lights

RAISING AWARENESS OF HARC

21-25 October is National Advice week, and Advice UK was commemorated by launching a new campaign: *Advice Saves*. The campaign aims to highlight the transformational work of advice-giving organisations throughout the UK.

One such local advice charity is Hastings Advice and Representation Centre (HARC) which works hard to improve the lives of those in our local community by providing specialist Welfare benefit advice and representation, and income maximisation support. It provides a free and confidential service that aims to address inequalities, relieve poverty, and improve the quality of life for vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

According to Wendy Knowles, Development Manager of HARC: "In the year to the end of March 2024 we dealt with over 19,000 client contacts and raised over £6.2 million for our clients in previously unclaimed, enhanced, and reinstated welfare benefits and other incomes.

"We have recently invited Helena Dollimore to visit HARC to gain a better understanding of the vital work we do and ensure that our cause, and the need for our work amongst local residents, remains high on the political agenda."

For more information visit harcuk.com or email enquiries@harcuk.com

ESC HELPS PENSIONERS WITH WINTER FUEL PAYMENT ADVICE

Community energy co-operative Energise Sussex Coast (ESC) has launched a series of new community drop-in sessions at Hastings and Eastbourne libraries, as well as the Community Info Hub in Hastings Town Hall.

ESC urges East Sussex residents to check if anyone they know is en-

titled to pension credit, and (if they are eligible) to make sure they apply for the benefit before the 21 December deadline. The call comes in the wake of the government's decision to means-test pensioners' access to the Winter Fuel Payment, which last year provided over 11 million pensioners with between £100 - £300 in assistance.

For most UK pensioners, access to the Winter Fuel Payment will now depend on whether or not they are receiving pension credit. However, Age UK estimates that roughly 1 million pensioners who are entitled to receive it don't currently claim the benefit.



Anyone wanting to check their eligibility can do so using Age UK's free benefits calculator (benefitscheck.ageuk.org.uk/Home/Start) or (if they need further help) by ringing Age UK's free advice line: 0800 678 1602. For days, times and full information about the ESC drop-in advice sessions go to tinyurl.com/energyadviceoct24

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eastsussex.gov.uk/Bus-Fares



New Chapter for Vital Local Food Charity

The UK throws away around 9.5 million tonnes of food waste a year – yet 8.4 million people in the UK are in food poverty.

Established in 2021, St Leonards and Hastings community kitchen and food support initiative, Karmabank, has re-launched as Sustenance – a unique charity committed to addressing food inequalities by repurposing surplus produce, providing nutritious food for those most in need and championing climate-friendly food preservation.

Every Thursday at Concordia Hall, Sustenance provides a three-course hot meal cooked by committed local volunteer chefs, along with bags of groceries, fruit and vegetables, to people from many different backgrounds. From lifelong residents of Hastings to Syrian and Sudanese refugees, as well as Ukrain-

ian families fleeing the war.

Sustenance users are referred by local organisations, with nearly 300 currently registered – and up to 70 attending every week. They may be single people living alone, small groups or multi-generational families. Some are in work receiving minimum wage and still struggling to afford to buy enough fresh fruit and vegetables to eat a balanced and nutritious diet. Members sit together, eat together and swap their stories and sometimes, the contents of their shopping bags – creating a real community environment.

Rima Sams, Sustenance Founder and Managing Director, says: “This incredible project has brought together my passion for cooking good food, addressing food poverty and wasting less; as well as exploring climate-friendly food preservation



Rima Sams, Founder and Director of Sustenance.

techniques. To be able to make such a difference to so many people could never have happened without the collective support and dedication of our amazing volunteers, food providers and supporters. I am so grateful. Now Sustenance is a charity, the sky's the limit.”

Volunteer Madeleine Mason comments: “To see someone arrive on a Thursday, sometimes in a distressed state, and to be made welcome, be served a delicious lunch and leave with a bag full of vegetables, bakery and more, is truly rewarding for all concerned. We have a great volun-

teer team, and the skills people bring are utilised, appreciated and valued.”

Sustenance is hosting its official launch event on 4 November at the Kino-Teatr, St Leonards with an invitation-only screening of *Longer Tables* by Jake Bishop. This is a documentary that addresses food poverty in the UK and the work of Sustenance; it will subsequently be available on the free Water Bear channel.

The charity works with partners including Fareshare, Neighbourly, Tesco, Co-op, Sainsbury's, M&S, Sus-



sex Fruits and St Leonards Grocery, who provide surplus food on a weekly basis. It is run solely by volunteers and guided by dedicated and experienced trustees. Since 2021 it has:

- handed out 6,088 full bags of shopping.
- served 5,254 three-course nutritious meals.
- saved nearly 51 tonnes of surplus food from landfill.
- saved 142 tonnes of CO₂ from going into the atmosphere.

sustenance.org.uk



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Talking Big

ROD WEBB looks at the recently released Big Conversation report on enlisting community engagement in town regeneration

Under the former government, Hastings was one of 75 towns selected to receive a £20 million share of the £1.1 billion funding announced in September 2023 for the Long-Term Plan for Towns. As part of this plan, a Town Board was set up, chaired by Rebecca Conroy, Chief Executive Officer and Principal of East Sussex College. In July this year, community leaders came together to discuss and develop principles for community engagement that could guide the Long-Term-Plan funding to support the regeneration of the town.

As there is a sense that funding for this town has not always been spent wisely, it was heartening to be invited to take part in the discussions along with a diverse cross-section of community members. The workshop was organised by Hastings Voluntary Action and run by Always Possible – “an expert collective on building the future”. It was also good to see genuine engagement from those present – despite the lurking fear that it might just be a public relations exercise.

So it was interesting to see that the recent report appeared to capture what was discussed at the

meeting and address some genuine concerns of the wider public. The introduction set the tone: “We needed to strike the right balance between learning painful lessons from the past and imagining new possibilities for Hastings.”

Challenges were recognised: loss of local trust, frustration with surveys, squandered money on projects were all noted. The importance of local engagement and ownership was highlighted through examples like The Bridge community centre “which, despite being a great idea, failed due to a lack of local sense of ownership” and had to close through lack of funding. Suggestions were that improved engagement required that meetings be “in accessible, non-threatening environments” as well as describing good community engagement as “accessible, with clear, jargon-free communication”.

“Decision-making should involve young people, with training and support for peer researchers. Engagement should be local, diverse, and demystified to encourage broad participation. The consultation underscored the importance of adopt-



ing grassroots approaches, respecting local input, and ensuring transparent and sustainable funding to foster a more engaged and empowered Hastings community.”

One suggestion was that “a representative community assembly is crucial for Hastings, encompassing a diverse cross-section of the town's population by ethnicity, income, views and education.” It was noted that the assembly should be a permanent fixture to keep the town board accountable.

Recent events in Hastings have already led to the emergence of grassroots organisation, Hastings Assemblies (See *Hastings Assemblies: A Different Politic*, Issue 253: *Taking Power Back through Community Conversation*, Issue 254).

What was sadly lacking from the report was any reference to local media. This town is lucky to have three newspapers, one online and two printed, as well as a quarterly magazine.

There will be a more detailed analysis of the report in HIP Issue 264.

Labour are No Different to the Tories

MAYA EVANS, formerly a Labour and then independent member of Hastings Borough Council, assesses Keir Starmer's first 100 days in power and castigates the Labour government for taking freebies, voting to keep child poverty and letting pensioners freeze



Free Taylor Swift Tickets for Labour

Labour's first 100 days in office has been dubbed 'worst start in living memory', with six out of ten Britons disapproving of the government's record. Indeed, within a short space of time Labour has managed to cloak itself in sleaze, make it harder for pensioners to access winter fuel allowances, leave millions of children in poverty, and tell the long term sick to get back to work. The party now takes millions in donations from private business and billionaires, while removing desperately needed benefits from people who rely on

them most. As 'Austerity 2.0' is now being rolled out by the government, I'm left wondering, are Labour any better than the Tories?

In the week Labour scrapped winter fuel allowances for most pensioners, senior Labour politicians including Keir Starmer, Rachel Reeves and Angela Rayner have found themselves embroiled in 'Gift Gate', accepting luxury freebies for things like clothing, glasses, accommodation, gig tickets, as well as football and tennis matches. Labour cabinet members have reportedly

received £250,000 in free gifts with Sir Keir reportedly pocketing £100,000 worth.

Lord Waheed Alli - ennobled by Tony Blair in 1998 as Baron Alli of Norbury - has been a major Labour donor. During this year's general election campaign he donated £10,000 towards Liam Conlon's successful campaign to win Beckenham & Penge. Conlon is the son of former Labour Chief of Staff Sue Gray. Following the election Alli was given the keys - or at least a free pass - to Downing Street - a move apparently sanctioned by Ms Gray.

Another example of Labour sleaze is the case of the party's then shadow business secretary. According to the Open Democracy website, Jonathan Reynolds, his senior parliamentary assistant (who is his wife), and Keir Starmer's political director all attended the Glastonbury festival in June 2023 as guests of YouTube, which is owned by Google. Reynolds estimates his Glastonbury package for two including accommodation and 'hospitality' was worth £3,377 - significantly more than the cost of two regular tickets, at £335 each. Until then, Labour was promising to increase the digital service tax from 2% to 10%, which would bring in billions from giants like Google and Facebook. Literally the day after the festival, it emerged that Reynolds had ditched the policy. Voters, not tech-firms, would have to accept austerity instead.

Two years ago Labour were heavily critical of the Tories during 'Party Gate' and 'VIP Covid Contracts', and promised to take the sleaze out of politics. Labour Health Secretary Wes Streeting defended the recent gifts, likening them to a "charitable donation which was saving the taxpayer". From what, exactly? Having to buy Labour Politicians Taylor Swift tickets?

I would argue Labour are no different to the Tories. A recent YouGov poll suggested most Britons thought the Labour government was 'sleazy', while an Opinion poll reveals that Starmer's approval rating has plunged below that of the Tory leader Rishi Sunak, with a huge 45-point drop since July. After the government's first 100 days, YouGov found half of Labour's own voters were disappointed by Starmer's government, with four in ten Britons feeling the country is in a worse state than before the election. Perhaps most alarmingly for the government, nearly half (47%) of those who voted Labour in the election say they had positive expectations of Starmer's government but feel let down so far, with only three in ten (30%) feeling Labour has done as well as they had hoped.

'Gift Gate' came in the same week as Labour's egregious decision to cut the Winter Fuel Payment for most pensioners, a policy which suggests Labour would prefer to make accessing heating for poor pensioners a near impossible online task instead of a few pensioners who don't need the allowance receiving

it. Last week Starmer floated his proposition that those who have been long term sick need to get back to work!

Meanwhile, here in Hastings, Labour members on the council have voted to keep the two-child benefit cap, despite figures from the Department of Work and Pensions showing that a quarter of all children in the borough were living in relative poverty. In fact all seven Hastings Labour Councillors and the MP have voted to continue with 'austerity 2.0' leaving the children of this town in poverty. This leaves Hastings residents with the obvious question, if the Labour Party continues with its pre-election plan to increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP "when funds become available", why can't they also pledge to lift the two child cap "when funds become available"?

In May 2024 Labour received its biggest ever donation - £4m - from Quadrature Capital, a Cayman Island hedge funder who has shares in fossil fuels and the arms industry. The donation was made just after the general election was called but has only just been declared.

Labour politicians locally and nationally appear to have sold out and are clearly showing they are

looking to run the country through public and private partnerships, meaning public infrastructure will be used to support private business. Sadly, Labour's 100 days of talking down the country, having no real or convincing fiscal plan (other than blaming the Tories) has had the opposite of the desired effect to energise the British market and economy. Instead foreign investors are sceptical about investing and more likely to drive harder deals and worse terms and conditions for workers.

Labour now receives more in private business donations than trade union donors, receiving approximately £13m since 2022, while the three biggest union affiliates in the same period donated less than that, around £12m. Donations are obviously a clear reflection of policy priority and who has the ear of elected representatives.

Within less than 100 days in Government, Labour have shown they are no different to the Tories, preferring to punch down at the poor, rather than punch up at the billionaires. Instead, they have cosied up to the rich with freebies and donations, clear evidence of who Labour now listens to and, moreover, who they now represent and whose interests they prioritise.



Inua Ellams joins Hastings Storytelling Festival

Inua Ellams, the poet, playwright and performer, has a unique storytelling style which bridges cultures and histories, making him a significant voice in contemporary literature and performance. Hastings Storytelling Festival (supported by the Bright Foundation) welcomes Ellams' show *Search Party* to The Benbow Arts Space on 25 October from 7pm. Audiences will be invited to suggest any word, and based on these prompts, Ellams will select from his vast collection of works to perform, making the show both spontaneous and unique.

As an artist and patron, Ellams has been involved with the Hastings Storytelling Festival since 2013, when he performed and led a writing workshop. *Midnight Run*, a signature artistic project combining storytelling, walking, and community engagement, featured in 2016 and 2018. This event transformed urban spaces into immersive and interactive storytelling experienc-

es, aligning with the festival's mission of blending art with community culture. His work, focused on themes like migration and identity, resonates with the inclusive spirit of the festival while his storytelling style fuses African oral traditions with contemporary British theatre and poetry, a blend of cultural traditions which makes his storytelling deeply resonant in Hastings. Its long history of cultural exchange and migration, and its connection with fishing, trade, and, more recently, immigration, have all shaped the town's identity. Ellams' work speaks to the lived experiences of many in the town and beyond.

Born in Nigeria in 1984, Inua Ellams moved to the UK as a child, an experience that shaped much of his creative work. His work frequently addresses themes of identity, migration, and belonging, navigating the spaces between Africa and the Western world. He straddles multiple artistic disciplines, drawing on his

background in visual arts, poetry, and theatre to create powerful narratives that resonate across boundaries of race, culture, and language.

Ellams first gained critical attention with his debut play, *The 14th Tale*, which premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2009 and later transferred to the National Theatre in London. The semi-autobiographical monologue blended poetry and performance, laying the foundation for his career as a playwright and storyteller. Since then, Ellams has continued to push boundaries with his plays, including *Barber Shop Chronicles*, *An Evening with an Immigrant*, and *Three Sisters*, an adaptation of Chekhov's classic, transposed into the context of Nigeria during the Biafran War. He is also a noted poet, publishing collections such as *Thirteen Fairy Negro Tales* and *The Half-God of Rainfall*, which seamlessly combines mythology, oral storytelling, and contemporary themes of



White Rock on 1 November, featuring Brighton Gay Men's Chorus, Barefoot Opera and Black Voices, all events aimed at highlighting the different ways in which stories can be told and experienced.

More information about the festival: hastingsstoryfest.org.uk/2024

"Inua Ellams is an important part of the Hastings Storytelling Festival. His presence has enriched our Festival, inspiring and engaging audiences year after year." — Sandra Garner, Chair of the Hastings Storytelling Festival.

"Inua Ellams' participation in the Hastings Storytelling Festival is not just an artistic collaboration, it is a powerful statement about the role of storytelling in bridging cultures and fostering understanding. His involvement with the Hastings Storytelling Festival is a testament to his ability to engage audiences with narratives that are both deeply personal and universally resonant, and it promises to be a highlight of the Festival's 2024 programme" — Mandy Curtis, 18 Hours, Hastings Storytelling Festival Producer

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Call: 01424 752501 for more information



Hastings Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra at Christ Church St Leonards

Joy and Tragedy: Haydn & Vivaldi

Early in November, The Hastings Philharmonic Choir will perform two masterpieces, one baroque, Vivaldi’s *Gloria*, the other classical, Haydn’s *Nelson Mass*, accompanied

by the Hastings Philharmonic Orchestra, who will also perform *Handel’s Oboe Concerto in G Minor*. The concert will be conducted by the highly respected HPC Musical

Director, Marcio da Silva. The soloists are Hollie-Anne Clark (soprano), Nathan Mercieca (alto), Leonel Pinheiro (tenor), and Jack Lawrence-Jones (bass). Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) slipped into obscurity after his death until his music was revived in the mid-twentieth century. The *Gloria in D*, RV589, is one of three *Gloria* settings made by Vivaldi, of which only two survive. It had its first modern performance, in aver-

sion prepared by Alfredo Casella, during Vivaldi Week in Siena, in 1939. Since then, its rhythmic drive, sparkling orchestration and an expressive range encompassing both joyful choral writing and lyrical, tender solo passages, have ensured its continuing popularity with choirs and audiences alike. The Austrian composer Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) is perhaps best known for the significant role that he played in the develop-

ment of the string quartet and the symphony. He also composed very fine choral music, such that the *Missa in Augustiis* (Mass for Troubled Times) is regarded by some as his greatest single composition. Written in 1798, it is one of six late masses by Haydn. What the composer did not know when he wrote the mass, but what he and his audience heard (perhaps on September 15, the day of the very first performance), was that on 1 August, Napoleon had been dealt a stunning defeat in the Battle of the Nile by British forces led by Admiral Horatio Nelson. Because of this coincidence, the mass gradually acquired the nickname ‘Nelson’ Mass.



The concert takes place at Christ Church, Silchester Road, St Leonards on Saturday 9th November 2024 starting at 7.00pm. Tickets are on sale via the Choir’s website (hastingsphilchoir.org.uk) or at The Bookkeeper, 1A Kings Road, St Leonards, priced at £22.50/£18/£13.50. Students, under 18s, jobseekers and universal credit £5.50/free.

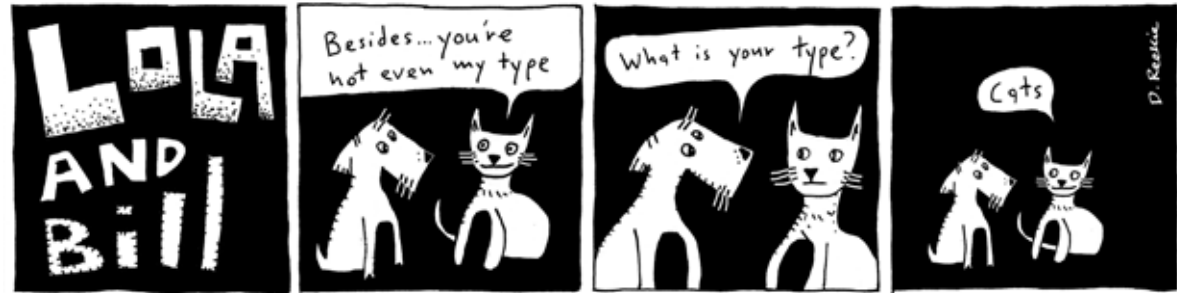
Stand Up for Winter

Hastings Comedy Festival kicks off its winter stand-up comedy series at the White Rock Studio. The first show of the season is on November 19th, and it promises to deliver top-tier comedy. The stellar lineup features Angela Barnes and Bobby Mair, and is hosted by Peter Rethinasamy. Angela Barnes, known for her sharp wit and relatable humour, is a household name on the UK comedy circuit. After leaving a career in health and social care in 2010, Barnes won the BBC New Comedy Award in 2011 and has since gone on to perform on hit shows such as *Mock the Week*, *Live at the Apollo*, and *House of Games*. Her latest tour, *Hot Mess*, has received widespread acclaim. In addition to her stand-up work, Angela is a familiar voice on

BBC Radio 4’s *The News Quiz*, where she recently took on hosting duties. She also co-hosts the history podcast *We Are History*, bringing a humorous twist to historical events. Joining the lineup is Canadian comedian Bobby Mair, known for his dark, unpredictable, and hilarious style. Mair has performed on popular shows like *8 Out of 10 Cats*, *Roast Battle*, and *Russell Howard’s Good News*, and has opened for comedy greats such as Bill Burr and Doug Stanhope. His unique comedic voice, combined with his knack for pushing boundaries, promises an unforgettable performance. Hosting the night is Belfast-born comedian Peter Rethinasamy. Known for his one-liners and stories about growing up in Northern Ireland, Peter has quickly become a must-see act on the comedy scene. He has supported Seann Walsh and Kerry Godliman on tour and will soon appear on *Comedy Central Live*. Open to ages 16 and up (under-18s require adult supervision). Tickets are available now, at £17. Doors open 7:15pm, show starts at 8 pm. Tickets at White Rock Theatre and Hastings Comedy Festival websites.



Angela Barnes



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Sister Suzie: Honesty in Mid-Life

FIONA McGARRY

It's been six years since Susan Sims released her last album: *Ain't No Lady*. "Life has been a little bit bonkers for me since then, so it's taken a long time for me to record something new," she says.

The new album, *Honestly?* will be out early in the new year. It's made up of ten original songs, which, according to Suzie, come out of her "being a middle-aged, sad, drunk and horny party animal mostly". In 2023, she suffered badly from fibroids and was forced to have a hysterectomy, and these songs address some of her feelings and experiences in a brutally honest way.

Essentially, it's a blues album with a whole lot of soul, a little rock 'n roll, gospel, a dusting of jazz, a smattering of two-tone ska and a broken-hearted ballad. The album tells the tale of a strange and lonely

time: experiencing midlife as a woman, trying to come to terms with everything.

Boisterous, bold and brassy, Suzie's heartfelt lyrics resonate with women everywhere. She says: "I've sung *Bitch Back* a few times live and been astounded at the response, women slamming their hands on tables exclaiming 'EVERY SINGLE LINE!' and telling me their hysterectomy tales. The song sings of ME wanting MY bitch back! – and I know most of us feel this way. I lost my energy, my memory, my derriere. I cried all night long (for anything and everything)."

Coming up next month, Suzie is releasing a single, *Time*, on 1 November. "It's a ballad," she says, "one that speaks of those things that hurt your heart and don't ever really go away."

On the same day there will be an album preview at The Henry Ward Hall with the usual 'Sister Suzie' line-up including Matt Jackson on guitar and Al Nicholls on sax, and addition-

al musicians who played with them in Europe recently - Ilias De Neve, Bernd Coene and Micha Teller playing rhythm section and keys.

You can also hear The Longshore Drifters, described by Suzie as "a toe tappin', honky tonkin', pearl button-wearing bunch of cowboys". Then there's an after party at Barnaby's with DJ Lee Eddington playing till the early hours.

Suzie is excited to be playing in Hastings and St Leonards again and likens it to New Orleans "because of the people, their spirit and lust for life". She is also grateful for the support she received when she was ill last year and now wants to help others in her position. She says: "Friends and family set up online fundraising for me, my guitarist Matt created a benefit day for me in The Albion and our community blew me away with their generosity."

"Since my recovery, I've spoken to so many women [who] want to tell me of their experiences. And now I'm in contact with The Menopause Charity, who are giving me guidance so I can hold open talks within our community; so women can recognise different symptoms and talk openly to people who are having the same experiences."

If you'd like to get involved, email sistersuzie.pr@gmail.com For more information about the new album, go to Sistersuzie.net

Blokes in Wonderland

HELEN MURPHY & NICK PELLING

The wonderful *Rogue Gallery* has moved. It is now to be found opposite the *Kino-Teatr* on Norman Road in St Leonards. The charismatic gallery owner, Ray Gange, is launching his new art-space with a knock-out showing of the paintings of the highly acclaimed British painter Ray Richardson.

THE POETRY OF CORTINAS
Richardson's paintings take us into a bygone world of blokedom. Dodgy men and distinctly dated cars are beautifully arranged into canvases that drip with the visual poetry of geezerland. His compositional skill is stunning; he divides canvases in ways that make his pictures buzz with a weird cinematic drama: the paintings are almost film-stills. You half expect Jason Statham or maybe even Bob Hoskins to be at a diagonal to a Ford Cortina. Or The Sweeney to crash the frame.

Yet his work is about more than tough types. There is an oddness to this world: not a landscape of urban anti-heroes: it is more spaced out,

more like retro-gangsters go on a mystery tour.

And then there is Brian. Brian is Richardson's English bull terrier who was very present on opening night. He features in many of the works. In many ways Brian seems the perfect creature for this south-east London world that is always tinged with menace. He seems like the living embodiment of Bill Sikes' dog 'Bullseye' from *Oliver Twist* (Dickens would surely love this show!) But, as with so much about Ray, Brian the dog is not what he seems: we found him to be an utterly delightful chap with more interest in his master's bag of carrots than the dark arts of doggydom.

PAINTING IN ENGLISH

It is perhaps a bit too easy to get carried away in defining Ray's swarthy South London milieu. The 'sarf London' stuff can be overdone. What struck us most is that he is just such a great painter. He draws with great economy but simultaneously with constant little surprises and technique twists, like oil-wash over conte crayon. The painter he most reminded us of was R B Kitaj but without all the loud Americana. He



Ray Richardson, *Five Aces*

has Kitaj's deft outlines and flat colour, but there is almost always that indefinable English tang. The taste of the estuary.

He is, ultimately, unique. He has gone his own way over a lifetime of painting - as if art trends and theories were just so much pointless hot air, which of course, they are. Never mind the bull terriers, go and see it!



The show 'Londain't' is on at *Rogue Gallery*, 42 Norman Road, until 10 November. For more information: rogue-gallery.co.uk/exhibits/londaint-by-ray-richardson



Samhain at The Beacon

KAT LEE-RYAN

Think Halloween but going back to its pagan roots. There will be amazing music, from Bad Head Day, Hannah Dennard (from Message from the Ravens) and The Fabulous Red Diesel. There will be a fire in the garden outside, fire-

works, food available and - Trick or Treat pass the parcel! If you're not brave enough for that, don't worry it's not obligatory. Fancy Dress: the theme is 'Day of The Dead', prizes for the most Fabulous, of course!

We will also be quietly celebrating passed souls, as is the tradition of Samhain.



Date: Fri, Nov 11.
Doors open 6 pm,
music starts 6.45.
Location:
The Beacon,
67-68 Saint Mary's
Terrace, Hastings, TN34 3LS
Tickets at Eventbrite: eventbrite.co.uk/e/samhain-party-tickets-1006404692527

BOOKBUSTER REVIEW

Silent Coup:
How Corporations
Overthrew
Democracy

By Claire Provost & Matt Kennard
Published by Bloomsbury, £12.99
REVIEW BY TIM BARTON

On Twitter (now X), a couple of years ago, Matt Zarb-Cousin wrote that ‘Truss and Kwarteng had no mandate to do what they did. The entire electoral system needs overhauling to prevent something like this happening again. It’s nothing more than a coup by sophomoric ideologues, whose worldview has come hurtling towards reality at the country’s expense’. Of course, our deeply unrepresentative ‘representative democracy’ has long needed radical overhaul, without us suffering unelected leaders. The nepotistic boys’ club has always been a thorn in our side. Anyone surprised that multi-million contracts get given to their mates and hangers on has not been paying attention to centuries of graft. PPE contracts, and ferry companies that can’t, are the tip of the iceberg.

Previous reviews here have also critiqued think tanks and lobbyists. We get to put a cross on a scrap of paper once every few years, and maybe, a few of us, attend the local MP’s office, or write a letter. Few of us hope for any representation over the big issues, even if we are lucky enough to have an MP who is good on ‘constituency matters’. Yet lobbyists, think tanks, Etonian pals at dinner parties, nefarious wealthy actors who grant all-expenses-paid beanos to UEA and Dubai, etc, have the ear of our MPs far more readily, and often right there in the Houses of Parliament.

That this is still deemed necessary shows that the elected government of the day has some powers. But, as Provost & Kennard show in their new book, increasingly corporations have the real power and use it. Many are wealthier than most countries. The long history of monied minorities seeking to effectively bypass, if not arrange military coups to subvert, governments can be said to start at the dawn of time. But for our purposes it is useful to consider the East India Company (EIC), which had tendrils throughout our government and elites in the nineteenth century, and indeed our elites throughout The Company, as the founding coup of modern attempts to subvert our democracy. The authors explain the even older routes, from the Genoese ‘joint-stock’ companies created to open up the Americas, and the Elizabethan ‘charters’ 50 years later – onward.

IN THE POCKET OF ENEMY CORPORATIONS
Today, many large corporations eschew the cosy relationship with any one state that the EIC had when the British Empire spanned much of the globe. The tools they have used to gain power over states are explained very clearly in *Silent Coup*. They in-

clude ‘free’ market mechanisms sponsored by the States, such as NAFTA and its successors; the pressure imposed on nations to allow ‘low tax; less laws’ ‘Economic Free Zones’ – Johnson legislated for eight more in the UK on his way out the door, and Truss, Kwarteng and Sunak were clearly in the pocket of enemy corporations; ‘the investor-state settlement system’; what the authors call a ‘capitalist magna carta’; Trump’s far-right ‘mega-donors’; and more.

Chapters cover the corporate raiding of post-Soviet Russia and the former East, the use of Special Economic Zones to subvert democratic systems, from Ireland to China. The chapter ‘Private Cities’, unsurprisingly, adds chunks of London, such as the Royal Docks Enterprise Zone – particularly ironic given it’s

undermining of, erm, sovereignty – to a list that includes Lava-sa in India, described as ‘the country’s first city built and run entirely by a corporation’; developments such as Ciputra International City and Ecopark in Hanoi; Florida’s ‘surreal’ town development, Celebration; Dubai, naturally; and more.

As the world teeters on the brink of ecological collapse, it is these extra-national players that are pressuring government to allow further fossil fuel extraction, scrape lithium from the pristine (apart from the plastics) marine floor of the Pacific, etc. It is these extra-national players that fund climate denialists online; push governments to deny and undermine workers’ rights; and suppress democratic candidates that stand against them. Often they use the IMF and World Bank to manipulate states into selling their assets to the highest bidder and deny nationalisation programmes. Aid programmes appear not as support for the poor and suffering, but as welfare for the rich corporations, to invest in profitable resource extrac-

tion across the globe. If you want to know who ‘development’ aid enriches and ‘develops’, *Silent Coup* is the place to start.

AN IN-EFFECT
ALTERNATIVE WORLD
GOVERNMENT

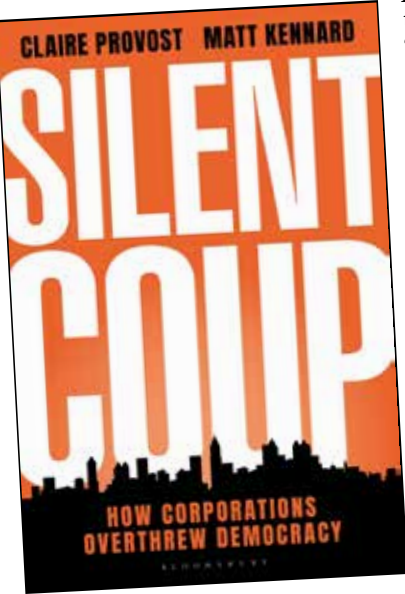
Further chapters include ‘Finance is King’, which since Reaganomics and Thatcherism is truer than ever and, scarily if unsurprisingly, ‘Corporate Armies’. Blackrock you may have heard of and they too have their inevitable place in this story. Topically, a chapter is given over to private security forces under the guise of the IDF in Palestine, as exposed by Human Rights Watch in the aptly named paper ‘Occupation Inc.’; and to ‘Fortress Europe’ whose borders are increasingly enforced by privatised corporate armies.

The authors are investigative journalists, so all this is related as a readable story of how they exposed the many worrying truths you’ll find in *Silent Coup*. ‘As we learned about these corporate justice and welfare systems, and corporate utopias and armies, that have shaped our world, we felt increasingly disappointed in something else: our industry, the media’.

Many of us already have some

awareness of the general outlines of this story, but the tapestry of subversion Provost & Kennard expose here is an in-effect alternative world government, one you and I have zero say in or control over. And, clearly, when the chips are down, neither does our government. If you wonder why Starmer and Reeves are so scared of raising taxes on the wealthy, closing tax-loopholes, restricting tax-havens, and curbing globalist corporate raiders, it isn’t just hypocrisy and graft, they simply have not got real power over our lives any more. The mass media frenzy over tax reform isn’t about ordinary people’s tax burden, though they claim it is, but about restricting the corporate take-over of the UK by exactly the kind of billionaires that own the mass media. The ‘good fairy’ warns us of ‘capital flight’, but never mentions how much higher corporation taxes are elsewhere in Europe where the same ultra-rich forces still reside. The ‘wicked fairy’, Jeremy Corbyn, wanted to act against them, and he was politically assassinated. He wrote the Foreword to this excellent book.

Silent Coup: How Corporations Overthrew Democracy is available from Bookbuster, 39 Queens Road, Hastings TN34 1RE



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CROSSWORD CORNER

Across

- 1. Friend finds expert to design impressive building (6)
- 3. Tempt hospital department to get frozen water (6)
- 4. Reorganised a Peter often on tv (6)

Down

- 1. Indian cheese found near PE building (6)
- 2. Unknown Peter turns out to be an ace (6)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 5 of The HIP List

1					2
3					
4					

Eat Write Love

NICKY TORODE & SONJA COLMAN
of Creative Concoctions - a social
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It's not going to win the veggie beauty contest, but it definitely wins hearts in a nutritional way. The humble, the knobbly, the tasty showstopper – the celeriac! Show some love for the ingredient that will transform your soups this autumn.

JOURNALING #1:
Don't Judge a Root by Its Cover!
List all the food – other fruits, veggies or dishes – that at first you thought you wouldn't like but ended up enjoying. See if you can get to 10!

FUN FACTS ABOUT CELERIAC

- It's the root of the more commonly known celery and is a very low GI root vegetable – that means it has less sugar in than other root vegetables and so is better for

balancing out blood sugar levels and maintaining energy.

- It's the descendant of the wild cherry.
- It originated in the Mediterranean and is mentioned in both the Iliad and The Odyssey as Selinon.

NUTRITION INFO:

- Full of compounds which support the prevention of cancer and help to lower blood pressure.
- Potassium – Supports heart health and muscles
- Sodium – good for provision of electrolytes after exercise
- Fibre – good for digestion and gut health

CELERIAC, CHICKPEA AND LEMON SOUP (SERVES 4)
Celeriac has a delicious nutty flavour which goes really well with

the freshness of lemon and herbs. They are a reasonably priced ingredient too, costing around £1.50 for a root and can be used raw in salads, roasted as a substitute for potatoes or, as below, turned into a delicious autumn soup.

Ingredients:

- 1 onion, diced
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 lemon, zested and juiced
- Salt
- ½ celeriac
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 200ml vegetable stock
- 200g chickpeas
- Large handful fresh parsley

Method:

1. Gently warm 2 tbsp oil in a saucepan and add the bay leaf and diced onion – put the lid on the pan and gently cook the onions without browning for 2-3 minutes.
2. Add half the lemon zest and a little salt and continue gently cooking with the lid on for a further 5 minutes.
3. Whilst the onions are cooking, peel and dice the celeriac into 1cm cubes.
4. Remove lid and add the celeriac

– cook for a further 5 minutes before adding the garlic and vegetable stock.

5. Bring to the boil, cover and cook for around 20 minutes. Then add the chickpeas and some additional water if needed.
6. Now, using the parsley, the remaining lemon zest, a little salt and 1 tbsp olive oil, make a gremolata (this is basically a chopped herb paste). Pile up the parsley and drizzle the oil, salt and zest on top, then using a chopping knife, chop the pile up until it forms a rough paste. Put it to one side.
7. Stir remaining lemon juice into the pan & cook for just 2 minutes.
8. Turn off heat from under the pan and stir in most of the gremolata – leave some aside for serving. Then cover the pan and leave the flavours to blend in.
9. When you are ready to serve, drizzle some of the extra gremolata on top.

SUBSTITUTES

- Celeriac gives a unique flavour, but parsnips work just as well, or a combination of the two would be fine.
- Using bottled lemon juice would also work well; you lose a little

bit of flavour without the zest. but adding in an extra splash of juice will boost it up.

STORAGE
This soup is fine to keep in the fridge for 2-3 days, but it also freezes brilliantly.

JOURNALING #2
Pot Luck [7 mins]

- Write about a time when you didn't follow a recipe, just had a look in your cupboard and concocted something.
- How did it turn out? How did you feel at having made something your way?

JOURNALING #3
Zhuzh Your Shop!

- Next time you're wandering up the veg aisle, pick up a cousin of the celeriac to turn into soup, something you don't normally use ... turnip? beet? swede? And pair it with a different kind of bread – pitta, cheese scone, pumpernickel?
- Start a commitment: Try 'Something New Tuesdays'!
- Reflect in your journal what you notice about your new habits.





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ATHLETICS

Hastings Parkrun 20th Anniversary

CHRIS SANDERSON, runner and volunteer at Hastings Parkrun, explores the popularity of the weekly event, that's not run in a park

Probably most people across Britain are aware of Parkrun. Its 20-year anniversary this month has given it extra publicity.

Film footage shows friendly crowds of people - of all ages, shapes and sizes - happily running, walking, or jogging together, clearly enjoying the event. Parkrun is a race that's not really a race because there are no glittering prizes, and achievement is seen as relative: individuals compete to achieve their own personal goals.

Yes, some are serious athletes but the vast majority are not, and the serious athletes show huge respect for their slower companions who have more modest goals. The shouts from supporters are as loud for the slower participants approaching the finish line as they are for the super-fast ones. In fact, they are often more enthusiastic for those further back who may be achieving something remarkable, determined to be fit whatever the odds. Apart from people who have overcome real disabilities, there are "couch potatoes" who have transformed through Parkrun, and many a "senior" has found there is still plenty of spring in their steps if they work

at it. Fitness doesn't happen overnight of course, and people should develop it gradually. There are some "walk to run" groups in operation locally and plenty of people who park walk rather than park run.

SAME PRINCIPLES

Since that memorable day twenty years ago, Parkruns have been set up in places all over the country and in many places overseas, but they all follow the same principles: always on Saturday morning at 9am (only an extreme event, like a strong storm, can cause a cancellation), always five kilometres in distance, completely free, run by volunteers, and no newcomer need ever fear coming in last because there is always a tail-walker at the back. Furthermore, once you have registered, you can take part in any Parkrun wherever it is, here in the UK or abroad. Some people even like to travel around doing 'Parkrun tourism'.

After a short briefing from the Race Coordinator, everyone starts at the same time with no separate groupings for gender, age or disability. With such a large group of people, simple good manners means that most people judge to some ex-

tent where they should start, leaving the fast runners at the front. Runners with pushchairs or dogs (on a short lead), slow joggers and walkers start further back. At the very back is the tail walker.

Many friendships are struck during the race, especially amongst those taking it easy enough to be able to chat! You meet people you might never otherwise have met. This mixture of characters and talents lends itself to a remarkable group feeling of friendship. Being in the fresh air and getting exercise is already good for your health, both physical and mental, but, add to that the social experience, and then you discover the joy of Parkrun.

NO PAYMENTS

But how does such a remarkable event take place when no payments are made to anyone? The answer: it's so recognisably a good thing that there are always people willing to give up some of their time to work on it. The organisers dedicate many hours of the week, but they are backed up by volunteers who, having been told what they need to do, just arrive on Saturday morning to put on a parkrun volunteer bib and help as marshals or with some other straightforward task. The participants are always appreciative, so it is almost as pleasant to be a volunteer as to compete. The happy, excited atmosphere is contagious.

The name 'Parkrun' arose because most towns and cities hold the event in a park. Here in Hastings we are lucky to be able to run along by the sea, from Grosvenor Gardens, past the pier, on almost to Robertson Street, then back again. Our seaside town is valued highly by parkrun tourists, not only for its many local tourist attractions but also because its flat course, all on hard surface, makes it a good place to get a Personal Best (PB). It has an element of surprise though - the wind! When there are odds to overcome, as the weather sometimes gives us, there is plenty of good-natured complaining leading to a lot of laughter.

I asked a few local people why they take part, either as competitors or as volunteers. The answers were invariably enthusiastic: "great start to the weekend", "it's something we can do as a family", "I was starting to become a couch potato" etc.

Eric Hardwick (MBE for his 40 years as race director of the annual Hastings Half Marathon) summed up:

"After being a runner for many years, I had a bad accident on the ski slopes and thought I could never run again, but, after helping to get Hastings Parkrun started, I was pleased to take part in the first one, and then continued! Gradually it helped me back to racing 10Ks and Half Marathons. As I got older I varied my Saturday mornings between helping as Funnel Manager and taking part."

"My 100th Park Run coincided with my 80th Birthday. In celebration, all my family and friends joined me there (some taking part) to celebrate. That was three years ago and I still enjoy the anticipation of looking up Parkrun results every Saturday, even if not running. I may be getting slower with age, but it is good some days to be the best in my age category."

To take part, register at parkrun.org.uk and download a barcode. At the end of each race, your barcode is scanned so you can be given an official time and position as well as your age (and gender) related percentage score. That way you can keep track of your improvement, trying to improve your Personal Best (PB) with regular participation. To volunteer, go to hastings@parkrun.com.

FOOTBALL

United Defence Regroups at Cray

12 October:
Dulwich Hamlet 3,
Hastings Utd 0
15 October:
Hastings Utd 2,
Cheshunt 3
19 October:
Cray Wanderers 0,
Hastings Utd 0

Hastings United secured only their first point in three Isthmian League games when they drew 0-0 with Cray Wanderers last Saturday. However, it represented their first clean sheet in the league for over two months, and was clearly a more resilient defensive performance than when they succumbed 3-0 to the same opponents in an FA Cup-tie on 28 September.

At Dulwich on 12 October, the 'U's had matched their hosts for much of the game but conceded two goals in quick succession, the second a defensive mix-up, to trail 2-0 at half-time. Both sides hit the woodwork in the second half before a further late goal for the London side put the result beyond doubt.

Three days later, United hosted Cheshunt, who had previously won only one league game all season. For 20 minutes the 'U's were largely

dominant, Freddie Legg thumped an opening goal, and confidence seemed high. Then goalkeeper Louis Rogers came flying out of his goal to make a rash challenge on a Cheshunt forward, hacked him down just outside the penalty area, and received a straight red card. Without a substitute keeper on the bench, Hastings put Tommy Fagg in goal. It proved an unfortunate choice.

Fagg's first touch was to pick the ball out of the net after opposing midfielder Vas Vasilou chipped the immediate free kick over the defensive wall. Worse followed as the deputy keeper spilled a straightforward aerial ball soon after and allowed Vasilou to score a second from a tight angle. Then he was beaten a third time before halftime as a through ball exposed the 'U's' disintegrating defence. At 3-1 down, and the rest of the game to play with ten men against eleven, the game already looked beyond them.

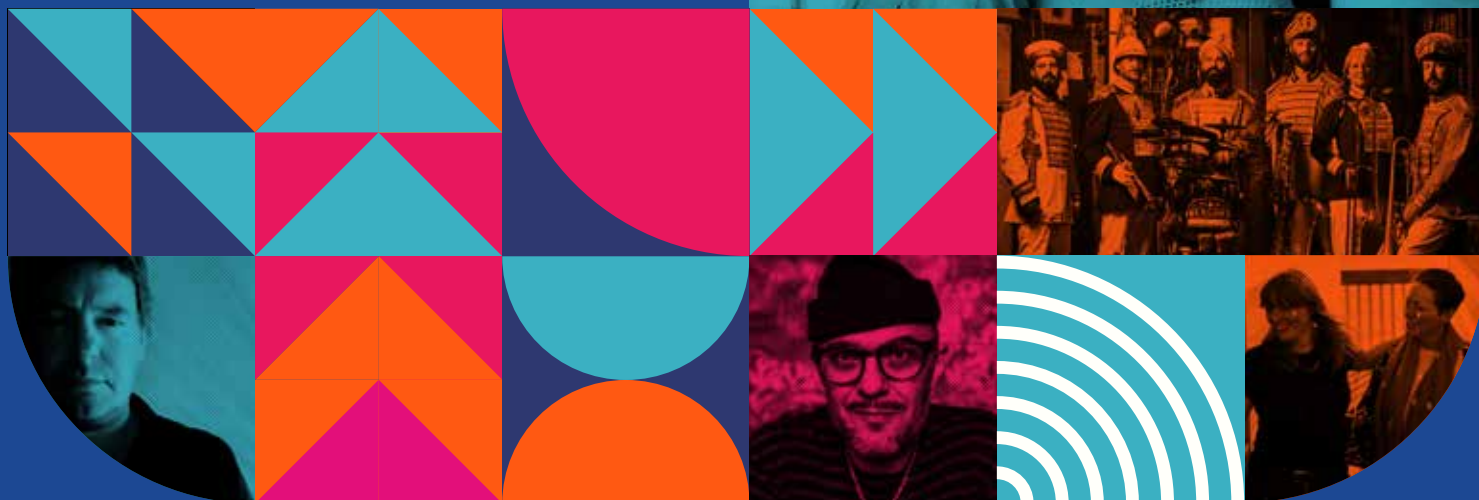
To their credit, they fought valiantly in the second half, Billy Vigar taking over the keeper's role in an assured display and Fin Chapman scoring his team's second with a low finish ten minutes from time, but an equaliser wasn't forthcoming.



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