

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



10
YEARS OF
INDEPENDENT
JOURNALISM



A Year in HIP



Government Acts over Hastings Schools Funding

ERIN WARD

The Government has committed to abolishing the current Academy Schools' funding model following the intervention of local MP Helena Doolimore in the House of Commons on 9 December.

The Labour and Cooperative Member of Parliament told the Education Minister, Catherine McKinnell, that parents, teachers and students in her constituency "were horrified to find out that the University of Brighton Academies Trust (UBAT) has been taking a whopping 20% of the Government grant meant for our local schools and education." She went on to ask "What is the Min-

ister doing to resolve these issues and make sure that every child in Hastings and Rye gets the best quality education?"

In response, the Education Minister, Gillian Keegan, admitted that the outcomes in some schools in Hastings were "just not good enough." She said the Department for Education was "determined to drive up standards" and would "continue to work with the University of Brighton Academies Trust on that."

The Minister went on to commit the Government "to ending its current financial model and to collaborating with school leaders on future budget setting to ensure we can drive high and rising standards in every school, including in Hastings."



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Annie Bryden
anniebryden@yahoo.com

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Details from design@yourhip.co.uk

EDITOR'S NOTE

Within this bumper, 32-page, festive season issue you'll discover an expanded news section and events listings to see you through until 2025.

To allow its tired volunteers (new recruits always welcome...) a proper winter break, we're skipping an issue so the next edition of HIP will publish on Friday 17 January. .

Kicking off with a scoop about school academy funding, the News section provides various perspectives on the housing crisis, a heart-warming local refugee story and an entire page devoted to readers' letters.

You'll find a cornucopia of grass-root-based participatory activities in the Community pages, reflections AI, and toxic men in Opinion and a fascinating Feature on plans for a Hastings botanic garden and its historical links with pioneering plant painter, Marianne North.

In Arts we've previews of the pantomime, gigs at the Piper and a performance from stand-up Suzi Ruffell, part of Hastings Comedy Festival's winter programme.

Speaking of which, in the middle pages you'll find a timely round up of just some of the local stories HIP reported upon this year, not least our general election hustings.

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News



JASON ELLIS

Staff, parents and children demonstrate outside of The Baird Primary Academy in July 2024

APPLICATION FOR A PREMISES LICENCE

Notice is hereby given that on 14th day of December 2024 an application was made to HASTINGS BOROUGH COUNCIL

James John Henderson, 168 Edmund Road, Hastings, East Sussex, TN35 5LQ

to obtain a premises licence for the premises known as Jamie's Café and Bistro, 482 Old London Road, Hastings, East Sussex, TN35 5BG

in the following respects license to sell alcohol with food between 11am and 11pm Monday to Saturday, 12pm and 6pm 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 days

from the date of the application shown above.

It is an offence knowingly or recklessly to make a false statement in connection with an application & the maximum fine is £5000 for which a person is liable on summary conviction for the offence.

Dated this 14th day of December 2024

HASTINGS TIDES									
DATE	HIGH AND LOW TIDES				SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON		
FRI 20 DEC	H 1:52am	L 8:49am	H 2:13pm	L 9:07pm	7:57	3:53			
SAT 21 DEC	H 2:33am	L 9:29am	H 2:58pm	L 9:43pm	7:57	3:54			
SUN 22 DEC	H 3:18am	L 10:11am	H 3:49pm	L 10:59pm	7:58	3:54	THIRD		
MON 23 DEC	H 4:08am	L 10:58am	H 4:48pm	L 11:15pm	7:58	3:55			
TUES 24 DEC	H 5:08am	L 11:53am	H 5:55pm		7:58	3:55			
WEDS 25 DEC	L 0:14am	H 6:15am	L 12:55pm	H 7:02pm	7:59	3:56			
THURS 26 DEC	L 1:22am	H 7:20am	L 2:01pm	H 8:02pm	7:59	3:57			
FRI 27 DEC	L 2:33am	H 8:18pm	L 3:04pm	H 8:54pm	7:59	3:58			
SAT 28 DEC	L 3:33am	H 9:09am	L 3:58pm	H 9:39pm	8:00	3:58			
SUN 29 DEC	L 4:24am	H 9:51am	L 4:45pm	H 10:17pm	8:00	3:59			
MON 30 DEC	L 5:09am	H 10:30am	L 5:28pm	H 10:55pm	8:00	4:00	NEW		
TUES 31 DEC	L 5:51am	H 11:08am	L 6:08pm	H 11:33pm	8:00	4:01			
WEDS 1 JAN	L 6:17am	H 11:45am	L 6:38pm		8:00	4:02			
THURS 2 JAN	H 0:04am	L 6:59am	H 12:25pm	L 7:18pm	8:00	4:03			

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



THE HASTINGS ACADEMY

1 ← The move comes after months of negotiations between the teachers' union, the NEU, and UBAT, attempting to stave off further industrial action. On a ballot in which almost three-quarters of all union members voted back in June, 93% voted to strike, leading to a total of five days of industrial action.

The issue has been ongoing since late April, when it was disclosed UBAT had taken nearly £3 million (25.9%) of the St Leonards Academy's funds and around £1.1 million (16.45%) from the Hastings Academy and retained the money in their central funding pool - significantly more than the 5-8% that Academy Trusts generally take.

James Ellis, the NEU's lead representative for local schools, says, "We believe that UBAT has historically been spending huge sums of money on their central team, whilst giving inadequate funding to the schools and frontline services that directly benefit young people in Hastings. This has led to excessive workload for our members and has damaged the quality of education that we can provide for our students."

Since strike action was suspended in September, UBAT have agreed to a complete change to their funding model and have already made many executive staffing changes, such as the chair of trustees stepping down. As a result, they have requested that the NEU allow them time to reorganise their finances and create a new long-term plan for the trust.

In a statement to HIP, Ms Dollimore said, "since being elected, I have worked to resolve problems with the University of Brighton Academy Trust, which have led to around 3000 children missing school. I share concerns about the management and finances of UBAT, and in recent weeks I have had meetings with Ministers and officials in the Department of Education to raise these issues."

More than 10,000 schools - nearly half of the UK total - are Academies, run by 1,200 multi-academy trusts. All could potentially be affected by the Department for Education's new funding model.

We contacted UBAT for comment but have not received a response.

SITE NOTICE FOR APPLICATION FOR A PREMISES LICENCE

This notice is to advise that on 11th day of December 2024 an application for the grant of a variation of a Premises Licence was made to Hastings Borough Council for the premises known as Bella Wine Bar, 44-45 George Street, Hastings, TN34 3EA

Was made by : Ali Altimis for the following licensable activities or proposed variation;

Variation is to remove the following conditions and to update the floor plan to include the installation of a bar.

SIA: a. All pre-booked events shall be risk assessed by the Designated Premises Supervisor and a minimum of two SIA registered door staff shall be on duty on any occasion where the risk assessment shows it to be

necessary. The door staff shall be on duty from 30 minutes prior to the start of the event until 30 minutes afterwards.

Café Bar: a. Alcohol shall only be supplied by waiter/waitress service to people seated at tables. b. Food shall be available at all times when the premises is open and trading. The primary use of the premises shall be as a café/Restaurant, not be that of a bar and any promotions and advertising will refer to it as such.

Add following conditions

SIA registered door supervision will be provided by the George Street patrol on Friday, Saturdays, New Years Eve and days preceding a Bank Holiday. To be an active member of the Hastings area Business Crime Reduction Partnership, BAR WATCH scheme. A concurrent planning application for change of use

from E Class to Sui Generis will be applied for to the premises to operate as a bar.

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 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.

DAVE YOUNG



Waiting for Answers

ROD WEBB reacts to open letter written to local MP by Hastings & District Palestinian Solidarity Campaign

As the Gaza conflict approaches the New Year after nearly 14 months of Israel's onslaught on the Palestinian enclave, the killing of innocent civilians continues. One recent attack, which resulted in the killing of a Save the Children aid worker, prompted Hastings & District Palestine Solidarity Campaign to write an open letter to their MP, Helena Dollimore, who used to work for the organisation.

This is what Hastings & District PSC wrote:

"We write to you on day 425 of Israel's genocide in Gaza, where the remorseless murder and starvation of the civilian Palestinian population grinds on, to ask whether you condemn Israel's murder of the Save the Children worker Ahmad Faisal Islem Al-Qadi last weekend?"

"Ahmad, who was deaf, was returning home from the mosque to his wife and three-year-old daughter when he was killed by an Israeli missile in Khan Yunis, along with 16 others in two separate attacks on the same day.

"Ahmad was known for his self-

less determination to help others and dedication to his young daughter. He is the second Save the Children worker to be killed by Israel since October 2023.

"You have shared with constituents that you used to work for the international aid charity Save the Children, which started in the UK - now Israel has killed two of your former colleagues.

"The charity's Chief Executive Inger Ashing has expressed her grief and outrage at this latest killing, demanding an investigation, accountability and an end to Israel's violence against civilians and humanitarian workers.

"Will you support that call?"

"Last weekend Israel killed several more aid workers from the charity the World Central Kitchen which led to the vital service being stopped at a time of catastrophic, Israeli-engineered famine.

"Do you condemn the targeting of these aid workers too?"

"In the last year, Israel has killed over 333 aid workers, according to the UN, the highest number ever

recorded in a single crisis.

"It has also targeted journalists, medics, civil defence and UN workers and children in unprecedented numbers.

"Do you condemn these killings?"

"The International Criminal Court has recently issued arrest warrants for Israeli leaders Benjamin Netanyahu and former defence minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"Do you accept, as the court has determined, there is a case to answer that Israel is committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza, such as persecution, the use of starvation as a weapon of war, murder, and other inhumane acts?"

"Moreover, that it is, according to its own former defence leader, committing the crime of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the north of Gaza and that, according to the International Court of Justice, Israel's continued presence in Palestinian territories is unlawful and that it currently practices the crime of apartheid across the whole of occupied Palestine?"

"Will you also commit to supporting the UN General Assembly ruling from September demanding that Israel end its occupation of all Palestinian territories within a year?"

"As your constituents we would welcome a strong stance from our Parliamentary representative in defence of international humanitarian law and a public commitment for the rights of all peoples to be respected, regardless of who they are or where they live.

The letter went public on 4 December and has been signed by 87 individuals and seven organisations. It was sent to Helena Dollimore on 10 December with a cover-

ing email which included the following:

"The letter was written the day before Amnesty International publicly concluded that Israel is guilty of committing genocide in Gaza and on the same day that news reached us of yet another tent massacre in Al Mawasi, killing 21.

"The letter contains seven specific questions, but we would appreciate an answer to an eighth - have you read the report, and if so, do you accept Amnesty International's conclusion that Israel is guilty of genocide?"

"We are keen to hear your answers which we will share with all those constituents who signed the letter as well as members of Hastings & District PSC, Amnesty International Hastings, the East Sussex Islamic Association, Hastings Jews for Justice, Hastings & District Trade Union Council and Hastings District NEU."

CONDEMNATION OF ISRAEL

Katy Colley, chair of Hastings & District PSC said: "We were moved to write after the murder of the Save the Children worker Ahmad Faisal Islem Al-Qadi...we wanted to ask her whether she condemned the murder of her former colleagues."

She went on to say: "It is beyond maddening that nobody ever asks our politicians to condemn Israeli atrocities which are being carried out every single day - hospitals destroyed, medics and journalists murdered, children slaughtered and maimed on an industrial scale... Is Ms Dollimore blind to these atrocities? Or does she condone them? Because right now, her silence, and that of her Parliamentary colleagues, is complicity. It is a deadly silence that is killing Palestinians

by the thousands."

Helena Dollimore has expressed her concerns about what is happening, saying "The death and destruction in Gaza and the wider region is intolerable." But as Katy Colley says, it is the failure to condemn Israel which needs to be addressed. This is particularly important now that Amnesty International has concluded that Israel is committing genocide after a year-long forensic investigation.

A SURGE OF PROTEST

Asked about the continuation of protests in Hastings against the genocide, Katy provided a list of events taking place in the last week alone. These include: a pop-up protest at Genocide Dynamics on Friday 13 December; a fundraising stall at Goat Ledge for Al Mawasi on Sat 14 December; A Poster Parade to remind the public of the ongoing genocide, to break the Western news media blackout on Gaza on Saturday 14 December; and a children's Hastings Madrasah link up with Al Mawasi kids on Sunday 8 December.

There have also been a number of other creative protests recently, and the 'drive by' protest in November went viral all over the world, sparking a host of copycat actions. This was reported in the Skwawkbox. "We're really proud that, as a group, we are helping to inspire the solidarity movement to find new ways to keep the public informed when the legacy media is hiding the truth about Israel's genocide," says Katy.

MP'S RESPONSE

In response, Helena Dollimore said: "The death and destruction in Gaza since the beginning of the conflict following Hamas' attack on 7 October last year is unbearable. Since taking office, the Labour Government has been calling for an immediate ceasefire and using every diplomatic lever at our disposal to work towards an end to the fighting, the release of all hostages by Hamas, for international law to be upheld, and for all restrictions on humanitarian aid entering Gaza to be lifted.

"In my maiden speech in Parliament, I called for an end to the conflict, and emphasised the impact that conflict has on children in particular - an area I worked on before entering politics. It has been harrowing to meet recently with families of hostages still being held by Hamas, and last week I met with the UNRWA Commissioner General who described the humanitarian nightmare on the ground. I have met with residents of Hastings, Rye and the villages concerned about both the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and rising levels of antisemitism and islamophobia closer to home. We all want this war to end, and I am always happy to engage respectfully with constituents on these issues. However, I will not tolerate abuse or harassment towards my staff or myself."

Hastings Housing Crisis: No Room at the Inn

PAUL MCLAUGHLIN

We all know there is a massive housing and homelessness crisis in Hastings. The growing visibility of rough sleepers on our streets, the simmering anger about the condition of both private and social rented hous-

ing, and the seemingly ever-increasing numbers of households living in temporary accommodation is evidence of a problem that is only getting worse.

Hastings BC has been taken to the brink of bankruptcy by the spiralling costs of temporary accommodation. Earlier this month the Cabinet was informed that this year's

budget overspend for the service had climbed above £1m and councillors were told that whilst preventative action had stabilised demand, budgetary savings intended to reduce costs had not materialised.

It would be easy to focus on the financial costs of the housing crisis. However, the real costs are paid by those across our town who are

homeless or living in mould-infested and/or overcrowded flats, and by those who face eviction because they do not have the means to afford impossible rent increases.

The new Labour Government has made house building a key priority and has just announced changes to the planning system to accelerate house building, including plans to change the rules on low quality green belt land. They have set a new-build target for Hastings of 712 homes each year for the next 5 years.

The Green-led Hastings BC does not believe the land is available within the town to meet the annual

target and so the scene is set for a political bust-up.

Meanwhile, the crisis continues and as we approach Christmas, a time of year when people are encouraged to be generous and think about those less fortunate than themselves, we have asked for the personal views of local people to give us their perspective on how we as a town and as a country should respond to the crisis.

This is the start of an ongoing discussion and debate within the pages of HIP. We want to encourage views and constructive suggestions from all perspectives. Please let us know what YOU think.

A View from the Streets

PENNY BEALE

While many people are looking forward to spending Christmas with family and friends, a shocking number of people in Hastings and across the country will be homeless over the festive period and beyond. I have lived in Hastings all my life, but I have never seen such a great divide between the haves and the have-nots, with the latter vastly increasing in number.

Without major changes, I cannot foresee any resolution. If things continue, the problems will undoubtedly escalate, and there will be worse unforeseen outcomes for all of us.

The growing numbers of rough sleepers require a compassionate, multi-faceted approach that addresses both their immediate needs and longer-term support.

Access to emergency shelters and safe spaces where rough sleepers can stay temporarily in safety and

in the warmth with food and a bed is an important first step. By coming in off the streets, mental health professionals, social workers, and outreach specialists can then engage with them directly in a welcoming and friendly setting. There are church halls, including the Salvation Army Hall, which could be used, if a permanent site is unavailable. Snowflake used to provide this service manned mainly by volunteers on a shift basis.

I am a firm advocate of the Housing First method modelled on the Scandinavian example. I've seen it work here, provided by Transom Trust, a subsidiary of Green Pastures, the ethical social enterprise. The Housing First approach is particularly effective for people experiencing both homelessness and mental health challenges. The model prioritises providing stable housing first, and then offers support for mental health and other issues in a safe, private environment. Individuals are helped and encouraged to regain stability and self-sufficiency with access to life skills training and employment assistance.

To tackle the wider housing and temporary accommodation crisis, we need to bring Housing Benefit into line with actual rents. The Right to Buy scheme must end immediately and any previous council / social housing stock coming back onto the market should be brought back into social housing.

We also desperately need a comprehensive survey of empty properties and second-homes, and to maximise the taxation on such properties to encourage owners to make them available to rent. In addition, the regulation of AirB&B's needs to be significantly tightened and landlords should be given practical help and advice to make their properties viable and let-able.

We shouldn't need to say it, but all charitable and governmental agencies need to work together in some form of harmony, unlike the present system where they are often competing against each other for funding pots.

With the right political will, proper funding and cohesive implementation, we can, and must, do this. However, the proposed deep cuts to a range of adult social care services announced recently by East Sussex County Council, alongside cuts to drug and alcohol support services, will be disastrous for people living on the streets.

The rubbish printouts pinned up in the main windows of Muriel Matters House, which give information of emergency services available to those living on the streets over Christmas, suggest a complete disregard of their needs and an acceptance that things will only get worse.

Penny Beale is the founder of the Penny Beale Memorial Fund and a leading campaigner locally against domestic violence and homelessness.



JASON ELLIS

Matt has lived 40 years in Hastings, 7 years on the street

Living Rents

Beth Boorman

Hastings Commons Community Land Trust (CLT) is one of over 300 CLTs in England and Wales. While CLT numbers have grown significantly in the past decade, less than 5% have decided to become Registered Providers (RP) which is what Hastings Commons is currently applying for.

An RP is an organisation that is regulated to develop, own, manage affordable homes, and generally, they are housing associations or

local authorities. The big benefit of becoming an RP, and the driver for our own decision, is being able to access capital grant funding through Homes England to build much-needed affordable homes.

Becoming an RP is hard work. It takes a long time – we started research back in 2020 and have been working on the process since 2022 – and it's not cheap with the registration and support fees. The process is designed for the big housing



associations with thousands of properties. It's the main reason so few CLTs are becoming Registered Providers and choose to partner with RP housing associations instead, or take on housing built by developers via Section 106 planning agreements.

But those options aren't really available to us in Hastings where the established RPs show minimal interest in retrofit and town centre regeneration and where there's a lack of large developments that could offer a proportion of CLT homes. In any case, we see the role

as building more than housing units. Home is not just a bedroom/kitchen/bathroom – people need space for work, leisure, social life, and a sense of purpose and belonging. So, we decided to convert our long-standing housing company, Living Rents (Hastings) Ltd, into a Registered Provider.

On the upper floors of the transforming Observer Building sit the makings of twelve beautiful new homes. Twelve new homes for people coming out of temporary housing or at risk of needing temporary housing. We have secured two-thirds of the funding to achieve this from Town Deal and Hastings Borough Council; the final one-third will be made possible by becoming an RP which opens the doors to the

Government's Affordable Homes Programme.

We know that 24 homes (we already own and manage 12 flats within Hastings Commons) does not solve Hastings' housing crisis, but they are seeds of hope. With the RP status we can get on with further projects, including supporting other community-led housing groups to achieve their own affordable housing ambitions.

Community land trusts have built close to 2,000 homes across the country. Together we can build and renovate hundreds of homes in Hastings. Become a member of Hastings Commons Community Land Trust and help make it happen!

Beth Boorman is one of five voluntary directors of Living Rents.

Be Bold to Deliver More Council Housing

ANDY BATSFORD

In November 2021, I was the Cabinet lead for Housing at Hastings Borough Council when we unveiled an ambitious plan to tackle the town's worsening housing crisis. The Labour-led council pledged to build 500 truly affordable homes, capped at Local Housing Allowance rates over a five-year period from 2022 to 2027.

This bold initiative aimed to address the stark mismatch between housing supply and demand, with over 1,400 households on the Council Housing Register and a growing number of local families becoming homeless and reliant on temporary accommodation.

The strategy focused on working with developers to deliver high-quality, 100% affordable housing schemes, while also utilising council-owned land to lead by example. By demonstrating that such developments could be both feasible and beneficial, the council sought to challenge traditional housing models and address scepticism from

developers and stakeholders.

Despite initial doubts about the viability of 100% affordable housing estates, which was often criticised as unattractive or socially problematic, progress has been significant.

At the midway point of the initiative, Hastings has surpassed expectations, with over 515 affordable homes either completed, under construction, or soon to be on the market. Among these, 270 are "new council house" properties capped at LHA rate, marking a major achievement for the town and its residents.

Key successes include the Harrow Lane and St Mary's Holmeshurst sites, which collectively account for over 300 affordable homes. These projects materialised despite early setbacks, such as the bankruptcy of the original developer at Harrow Lane. The sale of the site to Orbit and the subsequent commitment of Southern Housing to St Mary's Holmesdale underscore the importance of having strong political leadership and a bold vision in overcoming obstacles and driving housing policy forward.

However, challenges remain.



The start of the new housing development in Harrow Lane

We are all aware of the geography of our town, hemmed in by the sea on one side and the country parks on the other. This severely limits the availability of large sites, which are attractive to developers. The much smaller infill developments which are available rarely yield the volume or affordability needed. This poses the question, where are the next 500 affordable homes to come from?

There have been concerns raised about the ability of the Green-led HBC to sustain momentum. Critics argue that the Green leadership's preference for community-led schemes may lack the decisiveness and scale required to address the housing crisis. High-profile developments like the Horntye site will test HBC's resolve to prioritise affordable housing

amidst opposition from some of their natural supporters.

To ensure continued progress, national government support is essential. This includes:

1. A fully funded council house-building program to close the funding gap that currently requires developers to cover 60% of costs;
2. Cost-neutral mechanisms for councils to reclaim the cost of CPO's and repurpose empty homes, which remain a visible frustration in Hastings.
3. Revise the ridiculous Labour Government housing targets that do not account for the town's geographical and economic challenges, giving local authorities greater control over development priorities.

Affordable housing remains Hastings' most pressing issue. Without safe, secure, and affordable homes, the town's families and children face instability and hardship. Achieving lasting solutions will require hardnosed, bold leadership, creative problem-solving, and collaboration at both local and national levels. The 500 homes initiative has demonstrated what is possible, but sustained action is critical to prevent future setbacks and to build a more equitable housing future for Hastings.

Andy Batsford has represented the St Helens ward on Hastings BC since 2012, for the Labour Party (2012-23) and for the Hastings Independent Group (2023-). He was the Cabinet lead for Housing between 2017-2021.

A Personal Vision for More & Better Quality Housing

KEN DAVIS

The greatest mistake made with the provision of public housing by successive governments has been to concentrate on numbers rather than balancing numbers with quality.

Thus, a policy of poor housing has led to disasters on a large scale such as Ronan Point in Newham in 1968 when part of a tower block collapsed, killing four people and injuring 17, and the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower in West Kensington in 2017 which cost the lives of 72 and injured a further 70 people. But behind those, lies a huge backlog of maintenance from using poor materials and unsupervised construction.

Personally, I do not think the Thatcher 'right to buy' policy was necessarily wrong in principle (shock!) but, just like the NHS land

sales I was involved with, properties were sold off too cheaply just to get cash for tax cuts for the wealthy.

Moreover, I never liked the idea of public housing 'estates' because it can create discrimination in society that we do not need, whereas private ownership may create greater responsibility for what is personally owned.

I do recognise that there will always be the need for some public, or different forms of joint/shared ownership housing, for particular groups. Both outdated planning and land law have contributed to the present problems together with over reliance on the large-scale developer model of housing provision and their love of what is least risky and most rewarding rather than what may be needed in any particular location. In Hastings this has created too much 'suburban' low rise development. Planning in Hastings has been devoid



of any urban design which could have produced some sustainable mixed-use neighbourhoods.

Greater imagination is needed from architects, local and national government, as well as a new profit model by housebuilders. Good design is supposed to now be of prime importance in planning but there is still no guidance on how to achieve it. Why not?

With only minor changes to national planning policy guidelines, such as some relaxation of parking standards and more communal car use, the fairly standardised developer approach to housing could be jettisoned to open up a range of smaller sites in Hastings and across the country to new housing opportunities. These include the potential for:

- Earth sheltered hobbit-type houses built into the bank in Robertson Hill or at the top and bottom of White Rock Gardens (no loss of green space!).
- A small block of flats built over the northside St Leonards (Warrior Square) station car park.
- Allowing, subject to owners' wishes of course, development on some of the gardens backing onto London Road and Filsham Road.
- Repossessing the former WW1 overgrown allotment plots behind Old London Road in Ore.
- Using the unnecessarily large road verges on Churchwood Drive (between SLM and Tesco) and the one at Napier Road.
- Using the unused railway land at Hastings station (several possibilities).

There are many sites across Hastings like these which could provide additional much needed and locally distinctive houses and flats. All that is lacking is the imagination and political will to do so.

Ken Davis has 50 years experience of designing and project managing a wide range of building types and sizes, including private and public housing developments and one-off houses mostly in London and the South-East.

A time for Hope and Joy

PAUL MCLAUGHLIN

The collapse of Bashar al-Assad's brutal regime in Syria earlier this month was greeted with celebrations across a country fractured by 13 years of civil war. The Assad family had ruled over Syria with an iron fist for over half a century, with long-documented reports of mass incarceration, torture, extra-judicial killings and atrocities against their own people.

There were celebrations, too in Hastings, where a small group of Syrian refugees who escaped from the conflict now call home.

Abdul Salam Youssfan and his wife, who own the popular Daydream Café on Robertson Street,



Abdul Salam Youssfan and his family

fled from their home in the bombed-out city of Hama in 2011. Qamar was pregnant with her second child at the time when they made their way by motorcycle to the then safe haven of Lebanon. Yazan was born in Damascus before they continued their escape from their homeland.

When they finally crossed the border into Lebanon, they were homeless, nearly penniless and wearing only the clothes on their backs. They registered with UNICEF as refugees, along with thousands of others, and waited.

After five years, and the birth of their third child, Sulaf, they got a call from the UN Refugee Agency to be told they were going to the UK as part of the Resettlement Programme, set up by the then Prime Minister David Cameron in 2015 to offer a safe haven to 20,000 vulnerable Syrians.

The family travelled to Beirut for medical and background checks by British authorities and after three months of waiting they boarded a plane for the UK, a place they had never even heard of.

They arrived in Britain just before Christmas in 2016. They spoke no English, and the weather was "damp and very cold." Crucially, however, they felt safe and welcome in their new home, in Herstmonceux. They soon made friends and attended Eastbourne College to learn the language. Abdul Salam volunteered in a charity shop and trained with Mencap as a support worker for people with learning difficulties.

Their family increased again with the birth of daughter Baraah in 2018, and all four children now

attend local schools and regard England as home. However, Abdul Salam, who was a successful clothing designer and merchant in Syria, and his wife Qamar, still regard Syria as their home.

Abdul Salam is hopeful for the future of his country, but acknowledges that Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, the organisation which stormed into Damascus, has a complicated past and offers an unpredictable future. He says whilst he would like to return to Hama to rebuild his clothing business, he feels things are currently too uncertain.

He has not lost his entrepreneurial spirit and earlier this year he turned his hands to running the Daydream Café, which serves a classic breakfast and lunch menu with a distinctly Syrian twist. It has proved to be very popular, offering good food, a cosy atmosphere and staff who are friendly and kind.

Abdul Salam and Qamar say they are "so grateful" to the British people for taking in their family eight years ago. "They gave us hope when we had none. Our children are safe, and they can look forward to a brighter future. This Christmas we want the same for everyone back home in Syria."

More Delays on Road to Nowhere



Delays on the Road to Nowhere

East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has been told to explain to Hastings residents why completion of the A21 Queensway link has been so long delayed and when it will be completed. The town's MP Helena Dollimore has written to the County Council asking for "updated plans as a matter of urgency", saying businesses have suffered serious losses and that jobs are being put at risk.

Although the traffic lights and single-lane working on the A21 at the Ridge are being suspended over Christmas, the ESCC says "work will continue in the New Year, and traffic controls will be re-introduced". The

final part of the project, whose start was delayed so long it was dubbed the 'Road to Nowhere', was due to have been completed by 31 December 2024. Currently there appears to be no finishing date in sight.

As Ms Dollimore pointed out in her letter: "The traffic management has significantly increased journey times in Hastings, as cars are forced to queue through three sets of temporary traffic lights. The closure of Maplehurst Road and Junction Road, in combination with these works on the A21 at Sedlescombe Road North and the further works on The Ridge, means that there are no viable alternative routes to exit or enter Hastings from the north." Locals also complain that their residential roads are now overrun with vehicles looking to avoid busier main roads, creating serious safety risks for those who live there.

The original work was being carried out by the link road's sponsor, Sea Change Sussex, but the County Council insisted on taking over the construction of the final element having secured a £2.5 million government grant.

Sea Change said they had to ask their contractors to "remove their equipment and materials from the site to allow the County Council a clear space to finalise the project". The current work, and the delays, have been ongoing since early September.



Home Office Set to Release Northeye Site

HUGH SULLIVAN

A senior civil servant at the Home Office confirmed last week that the former prison premises of Northeye on the outskirts of Bexhill are no longer being considered as prospective accommodation for asylum seekers.

The site was purchased by the UK government in September 2023 at a

price of £15.3m despite known risks of asbestos contamination (see *Home Office Slated Over Northeye Purchase* in HIP 265). The original purpose, as stated by the then Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick, was to provide basic accommodation for up to 1,200 adult male would-be immigrants on a voluntary basis. Later, following the enactment of the Illegal Migration Act, plans emerged to use the premises for detention of men deemed to have arrived illegally—in

particular, those crossing the Channel on small boats.

Humanitarian campaigners such as *Bexhill Stand Up to Racism* and local pressure group *No to Northeye* pointed out multiple flaws in these schemes, and the change of government in July this year put them on hold. Now the Home Office is reported to be considering instead the purchase of hundreds of smaller properties to substitute for current placements in hotel accommodation and has decided that the Northeye site "is no longer needed".

Sir Matthew Rycroft, the department's permanent secretary, told a public accounts committee: "We will be working with our colleagues to see if it would be suitable for any other part of government and, if not, then we will be selling it."

Last year, then Bexhill and Battle MP, Huw Merriman, a junior Minister in Rishi Sunak's government, refused to condemn the Home Office plans. However, his successor, Dr Kieran Mullan, has lost no time in approving their reversal. He issued a statement: "I want to thank campaigners and cross-party councillors across all layers of local government for fighting against this plan...I've done all I can to support them. I am especially pleased for the residents of the Northeye Estate for whom the uncertainty and worry is over."

Uncertainty will, however, continue. The site is zoned in the Rother Local Plan for potential housing development, but the National Audit Office investigation into the purchase revealed that repairs to buildings at the site, including contamination clean-up, were estimated to cost more than £20m. Who is going to meet that cost, and when?

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

From our website

RECYCLING SCHEME
BOOKING 'BONKERS'

Bonkers. This will encourage fly tipping. Also – I parked outside (perfectly legal – no lines there) and walked in with two sheets of cardboard to avoid a 20-minute queue. I was met by two aggressive employees who started filming me “no walk ins!”. Suffice to say the cardboard wasn't recycled....

Harry B

By all means criticise Councils if they deserve it, but I can't see what the problem is here. Having lived in various areas where a booking system has been introduced, they worked well and reduced time-wasting queueing. I expect they also deterred people using the centres who were not entitled to [use them]. The proposed system is good provided you can book without having to wait days for a slot. As for the comment “who plans a trip?” – well who doesn't?

Paul Smith

How would £50,000 a year be saved by a booking system? What would the set-up and maintenance of such a system cost?

If the idea is to stop commercial chancers dumping their business waste without paying their charge then there are other ways of doing this. Some councils require suitable IDs from the client – a domestic address tied to proof of identity – but rarely enforced except when the refuse looks iffy. A ban on trucks, trailers and vans also maybe. Not perfect but it does work quite well, and ordinary people don't get hassled.

Neville Austin

‘Currently used successfully’ – presumably this means there is evidence that more waste is being appropriately disposed of as a result of a booking process. Hope it does not simply mean that the system has been introduced without reference to any other measure of its success.

Paul Franczak

Letter

HOUSING FOR LOCALS

Dear HIP
I was saddened to read Peter Bolwell's letter in HIP 266. The answer

to the housing issues in Hastings is not to pull up the drawbridge. Rather, we should welcome the inward investment represented by Londoners and others moving into the area.

Hastings has a wealth of Victorian housing, much of which has been poorly converted and maintained. We have many small local businesses, most of which rely on local expenditure, particularly off-season. The money those maligned Londoners and others bring with them will drive much-needed renovations and provide turnover for our shops and restaurants.

A Hastings that is hostile to such inward investment is doomed to decline and decay.

Graham Seaton

From our website

HOUSING TARGETS ROW

HBC's Green-led government is on a hiding to nothing. They want to build new homes but cannot match the old target – let alone the new one set by (Labour) Central Government. The confines and existing development of the Borough constrain any further development.

In the area of West St Leonards, we have 7 possible brownfield sites, but their suitability is questionable, at best. One is owned by the MoD, who have made no attempt to link its development to maximising housing development; three suffer the threat of landslips; one is ideal for housing development but hosts out-of-sync retail units; one involves the protected South Saxons and floods; and that brings us to the last one, the only remaining sea-adjointing land in the Borough (with considerable construction challenges) that could host leisure/tourism-focused development to improve the Borough's poor tourist appeal.

I feel sure similar problems exist elsewhere in the Borough, so no artificial targets and financial threats are going to provide the necessary homes. What is needed is a UK-wide approach to build where it is feasible, and where the infrastructure can support the homes. I would also suggest that until developers are restricted from focusing upon luxury dwellings (suited to being second homes or attractive AirB&Bs), and instead redirected to maximising the use of sites for much-needed 1-2 bedroom dwellings, we will continue

to waste opportunities!
Mr. Bryan Fisher

From our website

REFORM POLITICIAN
SIDELINED

Forgive me for not weeping for Lucian, tolerance of the intolerant (Reform UK are definitely in the intolerant area of the spectrum, see 90% of their policies) only leads to degradation of tolerance. Not to mention, someone with views like Lucian and the party he represents should not be employed by an extension of the government.

George Prince

When he “was employed by South-eastern railway in 2021 as an agency worker” I had the displeasure of working with this man. He was horrible and sexist and reading this now and discovering he was taken on full time just makes me feel sorry for my ex-colleagues who had to put up with him for even longer. Good riddance. Surely a man of such high standing won't struggle to find work elsewhere.

Rose Doyle

What a bizarre case. The Southern diversity and inclusion website states: “Our ambition is to create an inclusive culture where customers and colleagues feel able to be themselves and feel they belong to, and can add value to, their local communities.” Respecting different political opinions, especially when expressed out of work hours, must surely be part of this. Standing in elections really fits this brief!! It would be interesting to see the warning letter Southern wrote if there was one. ACAS guidance is generally pretty clear in my experience.

Nigel Jacklin

Letter

AZUR'S VALUE TO
THE COMMUNITY

Dear HIP
We are co-directors and current teachers of St Leonards Studio CIC, which was originally created to provide an affordable and secure venue for complementary health and well-being care because of a lack of affordable and secure venues in the town. Our aim is to bring like-minded teachers together and encourage the growth of these arts for community benefit.



For three years David Thorpe-Tracey accommodated St Leonards Studio CIC at Azur. He supported our vision of turning an unused part of the building into our own studio.

Sea Change knew of our work, our interest and how many members of the community we were helping. Assurances that we would be put in touch with interested parties to discuss community participation via our studio have not come to fruition.

In February 2024, after the closure, we applied for the building to become an Asset of Community Value. We have not yet heard from Planning about the outcome of this application.

Sea Change chose to seal the

building in the full knowledge of the leaks that were a constant blight on all activities. We dread to think of the extra costs incurred.

We are grateful to the Royal Victoria Hotel for offering us the Burton Suite as an alternative to Azur. We hope that the repair works that “remain under way” [As You Were at Azur in HIP 266] include the fixing of the leaking roof. Otherwise, this building continues to be disgracefully neglected.

Annie Cryar, Zowie Martin, Karen Simnett, Karen Hayler, Paula Conway, Lousie Carlyle, April Yasamee, Surrinder Chera, Catherine Burnett, Andrea Corso, James Loosemore, Gabrielle Lewry, Marjolyn Schreuder.



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Hastings Assemblies in St Leonards

ROD WEBB

The first town meeting of *Hastings Assemblies* was held at the Stade in June this year, prompted by a generalised dissatisfaction with the lack of political choice in elections (see HIP Issue 254 *Taking Power Back through Community Conversation*). It was set up as a self-organising body under a set of general princi-

ples, among them for “everyone taking part to listen and speak respectfully even if they strongly disagree”. One of the key decisions of *Hastings Assemblies* was to have regular local assemblies. This came from the realisation that the people most needing a voice were often too busy dealing with the practical problems of life in what looks to be continued austerity: finding a place to live and balancing the weekly budget. So, to generate greater participation, as-

semblies need to focus on issues of direct concern that can be addressed in practical ways at a community level. Last week I attended the second *Assembly* for the local council wards of Central St Leonards, Gensing and Maze Hill. Seeing barely eight people assembled at the allotted time of 5.30pm in St John’s Church Hall was a reminder that the local community would need ‘galvanising’. But within ten minutes, there was a more encouraging group of 20 people sitting in a circle and introducing themselves – not so bad for a miserable winter evening on a Sunday. What was definitely encouraging was that there were a few new faces, not just those who doggedly attend so many of the volunteering/activist events. And it was a varied group – inevitably with diverse views on how to proceed. Grace Lally, one of the original

people behind the initiative, found herself having to take the role of facilitator. She’d hoped that many more of the 40 people attending the first meeting – who had enthusiastically come up with relevant topics – would attend. The idea was that participants would divide into like-minded discussion groups, not only coming up with plans, but also self-organising for practical implementation. Instead, there was a loose conversation about some of the topics. But out of this, some kind of consensus seemed to emerge: one function of the assembly could be to serve as a hub which could harness existing volunteer groups to tackle specific local issues. An example of this is the recent mass tidy-up of St Leonards Gardens, involving Transition Town Hastings, Tidy Up St Leonards, the Hastings Borough Council and about 35 volunteers – a project that

will continue in 2025. And within this ‘hub’, a genuine community could emerge, inclusive and supporting and willing to tackle local issues both big and small. Rather than placing political action as the driving force, this could emerge through discussion and practical community solutions over time – perhaps to be discussed at a town assembly. I, for one, went away from the assembly quite excited about possibilities, particularly now that there is agreement to meet on a monthly basis on the last Sunday of each month. Roll on 26 January! Since the meeting at the Stade, there have been local meetings in Ore and Braybrook Wards, and it is hoped that others will emerge in 2025. See hastingsassemblies.org for more information or follow on Facebook @hastings.assemblies.

1066 Business Awards celebrate excellence in 2025

The highly anticipated *1066 Business Awards* are back for 2025, promising to shine a spotlight on the exceptional businesses that make Hastings and Rother thrive. This prestigious event celebrates innovation, resilience, and excellence across a wide range of industries, and it’s so easy to participate – entry is completely free, and submissions are now open!

The *1066 Business Awards* returned to the local business calendar in 2024, recognising organisations and individuals who go above and beyond in their contributions to the community. From startups and family-run enterprises to established industry leaders, the awards offer a platform to celebrate the breadth of talent and innovation in the region. Hosted by social enterprise and business support organisation Let’s Do Business Group and headlined sponsored by marketing agency Fresh Online, the 2025 awards categories have been designed to reflect the diversity of the local business landscape, including:

- **Business of the Year – Sponsored by FreshOnline:** A company that has demonstrated exceptional performance, innovation, and impact within its industry and community.
- **Best New Business:** Celebrating entrepreneurial brilliance and innovation among startups less than two years old.
- **Lone Ranger:** Recognizing the



resilience and determination of self-employed individuals, freelancers, and entrepreneurs who blaze their own trails.

- **Growth Champion – Sponsored by Lloyds Bank:** Paying tribute to businesses that have demonstrated exceptional expansion and sustained success.
- **Community Spirit – Sponsored by Lightning Fibre:** Honoring individuals and organizations dedicated to making a positive impact on their communities.
- **New Directions – Sponsored by Hastings Independent:** Recognising businesses that have successfully navigated change through innovation and strategic adaptation.
- **People First – Sponsored by**

Kiley’s Karpets: Celebrating employers who prioritize the wellbeing and professional growth of their workforce.

- **Future Leader:** Highlighting emerging talents under 35 who demonstrate exceptional leadership qualities.
- **Extra Mile – Sponsored by Only Lifts:** Honoring businesses that deliver unparalleled service excellence and set the standard for customer satisfaction.
- **Sustainability Champion – Sponsored by AAK BD Foods:** An accolade designed to recognise an organisation that has shown unparalleled leadership and commitment to sustainability.

HOW TO ENTER
Submitting an entry is simple and free. Visit our official website letsdobusinessgroup.co.uk/1066-business-awards to complete the application form. Entries close on 3 March 2025 so don’t miss out on this chance to highlight your achievements.

SAVE THE DATE
The winners will be announced at a business lunch on 5 June 2025 at Bannatynes Hotel, Hastings where finalists will gather to celebrate the exceptional contributions of the 1066 business community and hear from Gold Medallist Rower Emily Butler.

For more information, including entry guidelines and sponsorship opportunities, please contact stacey.pretty@ldgbgroup.co.uk Join us as we celebrate the dynamic and inspiring businesses that shape our region. The 1066 Business Awards 2025 – it’s your time to shine!



CATHY COBLEY

Saying Thank You with an Icy Dip

ROD WEBB

We all appreciate stories of survival against the odds, and Cathy Cobley’s story is one of those. Ten years ago, she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, one of the most aggressive forms of the disease. But with the help of a conscientious GP and the support of friends, family and the Sara Lee Trust, she was able to make a full recovery. After her life-saving surgery, she became a tissue donor for Pancreatic Cancer Research, went on to raise funds for the organisation, and eventually began to work part-time for the Sara Lee Trust. But, as if that wasn’t enough, Cathy has decided to “face her fears” for a fund-raising dip in the sea on the tenth anniversary of her recovery. The event is to be staged following arm-twisting from her cold-water swimming friends. She frequently meets the swimming group for coffee, but only because she loves their company, not with any idea of joining them. “It’s not my idea of fun,” she says. “I was coerced into doing it and am genuinely terrified!” Cathy always had ready-made excuses for not joining them in the

sea – the sewage, her weakened immune system – and would stay safely on the beach looking after their belongings and dogs. But last month, she was ambushed with a convincing story about the charity-raising potential of her taking part in a challenge rather than sticking to an organisational role. And that’s how she landed a date with the sea on 19 January, between 10.30 and 11.00am at Groyne 41, opposite Azur in St Leonards, Hastings. Cathy will need all the support she can get to help her ‘do the deed’. Moral support will be provided by her swimming buddies who will join her in the water, and others are welcome to take a dip with them or cheer from the shore. But, ultimately, it’s support for the Sara Lee Trust that will raise Cathy’s spirits. As she says: “The Trust held my hand through the hardest times and continues to give me a sense of purpose. Every donation from this challenge will go to The Sara Lee Trust, helping local people and their caregivers facing life-threatening illnesses.” To support Cathy, go to Cathy’s Chilly Challenge at justgiving.org, join her on the beach on 19 January to cheer her on, or both.

Four Courts Connect Proms performance



On 27 November, seven young musicians from the Four Courts Connect project performed at the Music for Youth Proms at The Royal Albert Hall representing Hastings and East Sussex.

The young musicians attend weekly after-school Four Courts Connect creative community project sessions, run by ExploreTheArch early career facilitators. They explore music together through fun, accessible approaches offering agency in an inclusive, democratic environment. They learn to play different instruments and sing as a group.

The seven children who performed at the Royal Albert Hall from the group represented six local schools: Ark Little Ridge Primary Academy, Ark Alexandra Academy, St Leonards CE Primary Academy, St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School, St Pauls CE Academy and St Richard's Catholic College.

The children played the violin at the Royal Albert Hall with 1,000 other young musicians from across the UK. The pieces they performed are part of the BBC 10 Pieces scheme which has recently been developed to include accessible resources for a wide variety of classical music (See bbc.co.uk/teach/tenpieces for more information). The participants performed the orchestral piece, *Earth*, by Hans Zimmer, *The Colour of All Things Constant* by Cassie Kinoshi



PHOTOS: ROD MORRIS

and *O Eucharist*, a plainsong by Hildegard of Bingen, arranged by Gabrielle Chudi.

The group travelled up to London by train and rehearsed on the day with a bonus afternoon break exploring the Natural History Museum before performing in the evening concert. Making It Happen funding supported the initiative through Hastings Voluntary Action led by community development worker, Su Barnicoat, with additional funding from Postcode Lottery Society.

Four Courts estate residents rehearsed the music to sing with the children at a joyous community concert following the trip - linking everyone in an event celebrating the connecting power of community singing.

The early career facilitators aged 16-27 years old are ExploreTheArch's diverse Gen Z equality change-makers who have grown up in Hastings and St Leonards and who are forging careers in community arts and the creative and heritage sector to improve diversity in leadership.

Young musicians aged 6-14 years in the town with any connection to the Four Courts high rise community in Wishing Tree Ward, Hollington, or keen to connect with this community, can apply to join the free weekly sessions from January. All levels welcome including beginners. Email: explorers@explorethearch.com Read more about the Four Courts community arts project at fourcourtsconnect.com

New Venues for Surviving Christmas

MEGAN SKINNER

Important news for all volunteers, donors, clients and others involved in the support that Surviving Christmas provides for the residents of Hastings and Rother at Christmas time.

Having had the benefit of using the Salvation Army Citadel in St Andrews Square, Hastings for some years, we have been forced to re-establish our venues for the *Hamper Project* and the *Two-Day Christmas Project* due to the exorbitant increase in fees it is now asking, £4,000 for hire of the premises for eight days, together with restrictions regarding the use of the premises.

We have been fortunate to be welcomed into Battle Abbey, the English Heritage site at High Street, Battle, for the *Hamper Packing Project* from 16-20 December at an extremely low cost to us as a charity. Other benefits include easier access for delivery vehicles, on-site parking for volunteers at no cost as well as savings on skip hire – so, all in all, a great move.

Our *Two-Day Project* for Christmas Day and Boxing Day, together with our *Santa Day* for the children on Saturday 21 December, will be held at His Place, Robertson Street, Hastings – our grateful thanks goes to all those in the community who have offered help and support to Surviving Christmas.

Whilst our priority is to provide for those in need at Christmas within the community, we also have to ensure that costs are kept as low as possible, and this move will be saving us over £4,000 this year. Our grateful thanks go to Battle Abbey and His Place for their support, generosity and understanding of charitable assistance. Please be aware that any financial donations will not be accepted at the Salvation Army Citadel.

Find out more at survivingchristmas.com, or by phoning 07759 452430, or emailing hello.survivingchristmas@gmail.com. Cheques can be sent to HVA, Jackson Hall, Portland Place, Hastings TN34 1QN – thank you in advance for your support.

Thanks to Fred at the Shed

PATRICIA HARTSHORNE discovers *The Repair Shop of Hastings & St Leonards*

I knew nothing about the Hastings & St Leonards Men's Shed until, earlier this year, a friend suggested I call in with my oval Victorian corner chair. It had just about survived my four children, twice been superficially repaired and reupholstered, moved house quite a few times and been in storage. Finally, eight years ago, it arrived in St Leonards – in several pieces and looking very sorry for itself.

But when I turned up with it at the



JAMES WHITELEY

well-equipped workshop next to the Community Centre in Ore, eyes lit up. Here was a pretty little chair crying out for some love and expert attention – and it was Fred Lay who enthusiastically got to grips with the job. It took a lot of his time, experience and expertise but the results were amazing. What a transformation!

So yes, we have a *Repair Shop* of our own, working wonders with all sorts in wood and metal, and providing tools, shared knowledge and social contact for those who participate. Throughout the UK, the Men's Shed Association provides an important community service and a workshop where its members can

undertake and collaborate on restoration, or create new or commissioned items in a supportive environment. Inclusivity is the word; everyone is welcome.



Hastings & St Leonards Men's Shed is at 20 Manhattan Gardens, Ore TN35 5DQ. Have a look for yourself on Tuesday, Wednesday or Friday 10am - 4pm, or Monday morning 10am-1pm for Woodcarving. Email: info@hastingsmenshed.org.uk Tel: 01424 444246

Community: Alive and Well in St Leonards

FIONA MCGARRY

On 7 December, members of the Progress Network packed out Concordia Hall for their fourth *Big Celebration*, this year entitled *The Big Takeover*. This is a hugely popular annual gathering – multi-cultural and full of children, mums, dads and proud grandparents – not to mention leading lights from the local community.

The Progress Network is a community-based initiative for the whole community, particularly those of African and Caribbean heritage for whom it was originally set up. It provides family classes and other bespoke and creative projects to empower families in Hastings & St Leonards. Their annual *Big Cele-*

bration aims to give them recognition – and especially the children. Their website points out that “St Leonards is in one of the most deprived council wards in East Sussex with inequalities caused by various socio-economic factors, lifestyle, and poor access to services.” The *Big Celebration* reaffirms the Network’s core belief: that all individuals regardless of age, ethnicity or humble beginnings should have the opportunity to become “the best version of themselves”. It is also an opportunity to connect with neighbours and community members and to celebrate and reflect on the achievements of the past year.

The evening started with some joyous celebratory samba rhythms from the Dende Nation drumming group. It continued with a kick-boxing demonstration and some moti-

national speeches, while snacks were handed out to the other excited children. Two young girls delighted the crowd with a duet encompassing shy hesitation, audience encouragement and final triumph.

Entertainment was interrupted for the great community ingredient of shared food (delicious hot food courtesy of Mama Putts). This was followed by the presentation of awards to the young people in recognition of their contributions to the community and a video compilation showing the activities of various groups over the past year. Their achievements were impressive, and they clearly had enormous fun; younger audience members laughed

and cheered when they saw themselves and their friends giving short on-screen presentations.

I spoke to Claire Oram and Kirsty Gipsom, who told me that the network was formed several years ago after several parents got together and started the Sparks Football Club for children aged five to 15. After that, they came up with more ideas for activities: art, drama and skin care workshops; drumming groups; mental health and well-being activities, as well as camps and day trips – this year’s outing was to Bewl Water.

A lot of the Network’s activities take place in open spaces such as Warrior Square Gardens. As well as sport and games, they bring art

and creative workshops to these spaces, courtesy of their *Great Work Creativity Club*, and this year they have completed the renovation of a neglected open space behind the shops in Kings Road. Adults and children have worked together to clear the area and fill it with painting, bunting, plants and seating areas. It’s now a great venue for art activities, storytelling, movie and pizza nights.

Another focus area this year, Kirsty tells me, is helping the young people gain skills in entrepreneurship (hence *The Big Takeover*). At the *Big Celebration*, some of the kids were organising the sale of hand-crafts they made themselves – taking the money and recording their sales.

Aaron Hosannah has now stepped down as Chair, but the positive energy continues as he is replaced by Jerome ‘Jerry’ Odibi, the owner of Mama Putts: see Issue 189 *Mama Putts the Man Behind the Menu*, for an interview with Jerry, where he first mentions his involvement with Progress Network.

Find out more about The Progressive Network, the people behind it and what they do, by visiting progressnet.org or their Facebook page [@progressnetworkkc](https://www.facebook.com/progressnetworkkc).



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I Take you into My Eyes

ExploreTheArch's festival show is a tale of a growing intense friendship between unexpected poets. Hadeel lives in Tuffah, Gaza. Yasmin lives in St Leonards-on-Sea.

The women in their mid-20s connected online. It was the week before Eid. Hadeel had 40 displaced children in her care with no immediate safety and mostly orphaned. Yasmin instantly actioned a *Go Fund Me* campaign to help support community initiatives that Hadeel runs with her family in her neighbourhood, and which include a community kitchen feeding hundreds of families impacted by conflict.

The production explores Hadeel and Yasmin's growing friendship of poetic text messages and video chats including family members delighting in hairstyles and singing together – the raw exuberance of



Yasmin Aishah at the British Library

friendship. "I Take You Into My Eyes" is one message that shares the intensity of the joyful exchanges and the poetry that automatic translation and communication across linguistic boundaries throws up.

The promenade experiential performance charts the journey of the initial polite and heartfelt connection – "Thank you on behalf of

these children, sister, they were very happy and accept your hand," – through to Hadeel and Yasmin's growing friendship. "Hadeel's mission was quickly woven deep into the fibres of the clothes on my back, the lines of purchase barcodes in my shopping basket and the dreams that sprang forth," Yasmin reflects.

The audience experiences Hadeel's neighbourhood in this promenade production. Through the flowers of Palestine, Yasmin imagines individuals in Hadeel's tower block as different floral species. Viewers wander through a set of brightly coloured, giant unfurling flowers depicting individuals through their vibrant urge to connect and share kindness and positivity in what might be their last day.

The climax of the production is Hadeel's house:

"The house of Hadeel is one that stands tall.

It is a house of resilience and compassion.

A house where 'home' is not exclusive to a single family."

The audience becomes part of the extended family in this unique theatre experience pushing beyond the television images of bombed neighbourhoods in North Gaza.



Hadeel Ameer Al Dadda Mohammed illustrated by Yasmin Aishah

Proceeds from the production will help sustain Hadeel's community initiatives in North Gaza. Tickets £15 + booking fee. Under 19s free, must book with an adult ticket. The production is suitable for all ages. Advanced booking essential in this intimate theatre space. explorethearch.co.uk/intomyeyes ExploreTheArch is the UK leader in Theatre of Domestic Life. Directions to the collective's 'theatre house': explorethearch.co.uk/find



The HVA Diwali Celebration

Age-Friendly Celebrations in Hastings

Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) have been organising Age-Friendly events and festivals to support and enable older people to lead healthy and active lives.

Back in 2020, Hastings Borough Council passed a motion for Hastings to join the Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities, a concept developed by the World

Health Organisation (WHO). The idea is that, in an age-friendly community, services, local groups, businesses and residents all work together to improve the physical and social environment for older people.

This October, HVA hosted a fantastically colourful and successful Diwali celebration together with St Michael's Hospice and co-produced

by the local community. It was a full house, with guests from a whole host of backgrounds sharing friendship, laughter, food, traditions and culture. There was a talk about puja (a worship ritual), and a blessing before the guests sat down to eat.

Food is a powerful tool to bring people together, and HVA are now planning their events for 2025. First up is the Chinese New Year celebration, in collaboration with Hastings Chinese Association, on Tuesday 11 February 2025 which celebrates the start of the Year of the Snake!

If you'd like to be involved, or to hear about other upcoming Age Friendly events and activities, please email Jane Caley at jane@hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk or call 01424 444010.

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12

2024 In Review



ISSUE 244:
Keeping HIP on the Road: Birthday Special, discussion of what the paper does, recent redesign Voices from founding and contributing members



ISSUE 247:
Community Solidarity after right-wing threat to Hastings Mosque



Issue 248:
Neighbourhood Rock... One of Hastings' biggest musical names returns home

Hastings Independent

2442 FEBRUARY 2024THE FREE & INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR HASTINGS

Pedalling

10

ISSUE 244:
Introducing the new look HIP



ISSUE 246:
International Women's Day Festival Promises to be a roaring success



ISSUE 251:
Jack-in-the-Green... Damp but Delightful



Issue 255:
Celebrating Refugees: National Refugee Week: Culbaba Theatre performance, Ukrainian amateur choir from Bexhill

PHOTOS: SARA-LOUISE BOWREY

REBECCA BROOKER

PHOTOS BY RENE RUDZINSKI



Issue 255:
Alright on the Night: Organising hustings for an unexpectedly early election was a massive challenge.



Issue 255:
Striking Teachers Demand Better Funding



Issue 256:
The Country Park is 50!: Hastings Country Park Nature Reserve turns 50



Issue 257:
Pride Reprieved: Pride event scheduled for 25 August should go ahead, momentarily cancelled before new sponsors 247 Taxis stepped in at the eleventh hour



Issue 262:
The Centre of the Community: Clifton Community Centre held a celebration marking the end of a year-long project to make the building more sustainable and accessible

Deus Ex Machina

ROBIN HOLTOM argues that through AI we have created machines that feed on people, making us in real danger of obsolescence

I was in London's Marlborough Gallery looking at photographic reproductions of some of Francis Bacon's paintings - large, elegantly framed and very expensive. But I could not see why he agreed to this as his paintings were so unique and distinctive.

I then noticed that the person signing books in a corner was actually the artist himself. Did I have the courage to ask him: "Why are you selling these elaborate photocopies of your paintings. You don't need the money!" But I didn't, and just smiled politely as I left.

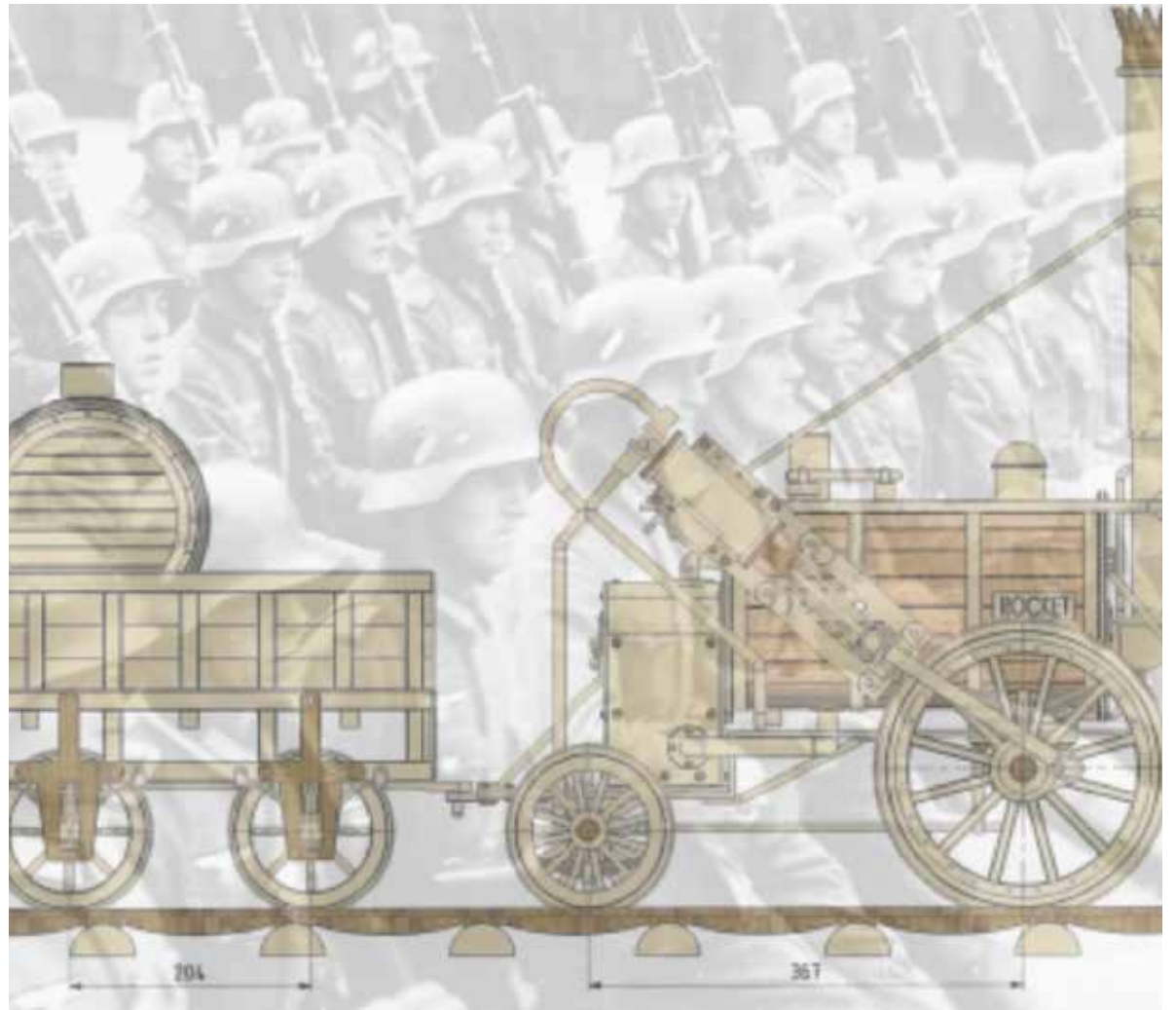
Bacon's paintings owe their power to the risks he took moving his hand and mind in the physical substance of the paint and canvas. He spoke of his work connecting directly to the nervous system. The photocopies distance us, alienate us from the man himself. This is just one of the ways in which we are all meekly letting ourselves be misled by technology.

Long before Artificial Intelligence was thought of, Samuel Butler anticipated the possibility of machines replacing people: "Are we not ourselves creating our successors in the supremacy of the earth?" he asked, and in 1872 wrote in his satirical novel *Erewhon*: "The steam engine must be fed with food, and consume it by fire, even as man consumes food. It supports combus-

tion by air as man supports it; it has a pulse and circulation as man has; it may be granted that man's body is as yet the more versatile of the two, but then man's body is an older thing; give the steam engine but half the time that man has had, give it also a continuance of our present infatuation and what may it not ere long attain to?"

Previously all work had been done by men or horses who fed themselves. Providing fuel for machines developed new industries. Many people's lives are spent feeding the machine. Transformed into a nomadic, itinerant organism, the new technology grazes on poorly paid labour abroad to harvest our data.

The villain of the piece may seem Big Tech, but we are all playing our part by feeding these machines so conscientiously. We nourish their power and influence, and they give birth to new generations of themselves. Alarming, they have no fear of obsolescence. Here they have a great advantage over human beings. A machine will cease being useful, but its demise becomes the impetus to generate a newer, cleverer one. We humans, on the other hand, are losing the race to develop and are, by contrast, in real danger of obsolescence. Our failure to be conscious of this only adds to our becoming more endangered.



Over a century after Samuel Butler, Rebecca Solnit shows us how far our infatuation with the steam engine has accelerated: "If you object that we are not in a zombie movie because there are no brain eating cannibals, let me reassure you, there are. The corporations are devouring our attention and chewing our lives down to the bone to get our data. They have shown their ruthlessness in what they offer as long as they capture and extract our at-

tention, information and other assets from us."

The men and horses who fed themselves have now given place to elaborate machines which consume enormous quantities of electricity but also require our continual attention on various screens to draw out information about our tastes and needs and, of course, our political opinions.

We presume that they are benign because it is easier than facing the

possibility of their malevolence and the way they really do make our humanity obsolete. We are led to suppose that the convenience and speed with which these machines work is something we really ought to try to understand and adapt to better.

Recently a government minister announced that, "We must be humble in relation to Big Tech." To me this feels like the equivalent for our generation, of the appeasement of fascism in the 1930s.

Andy Pandy Pandering

Annie Lawson

I always thought there was something sad about the Andy Pandy children's TV marionette who lived in a picnic basket. Perhaps there is the same tristesse about Andrew Tate.

Andrew lives under house arrest in a mansion with staff in Bucharest with his brother Tristan, where "hot bitches" are ever on hand, "like ashtrays", he says. He keeps getting hauled in by the police for crimes - including human trafficking and violence - for which he says there is no proof. Andrew says it's because he's escaped The Matrix and is no longer of a slave mind that The Ma-

trix persecutes him. He makes videos about it that he puts on X.

One Tate video followed the Kamala versus Donald debate during the US election that the brothers had stayed up to watch. When Andrew got to bed, he couldn't sleep because Taylor Swift had just endorsed Kamala on X. As always, bare-chested, munching 'Hello Kitty' cereal straight from a pink box and sucking on a gi-normous cigar, he said, "I was in bed, mid-pump, and when I heard that I knew I had to do something." He thought Trump could have been more savage in the debate and could have said to Harris "Shaddap bimbo get back to your blowjobs" (sorry about this, yes it's horrible but I'm taking the bull by

the horns), and he'd enjoyed imitating Kamala's facial expressions which were just as if she were about to tell Donald off for jumping a queue in a mall, but now it was all pointless because Swift's response would swing the election.

Andrew was incensed. "I HATE Taylor Swift!" he fumed. "I would NEVER allow a woman or child of mine to attend a Taylor Swift concert!" "Why not Daddy?" "Because Taylor Swift said 'Fuck the Patriarchy', and 'I am the Patriarchy!'", and then, "Taylor Swift is controlled by The Matrix. They've TOLD her to endorse Kamala!" Now he vents



a stream of consciousness fantasy which starts by asking in what peculiar circumstance would he ever find himself at a Taylor Swift concert? Only if his private jet crashed into the venue! Not realising where he is, he fights his way out of the flaming wreckage, and there she is! And when he sees her performing her antics, he realises she's sending him a message, because he's told her that he knows she's a hostage of The Matrix.

I'm against Tate. I've had enough experiences of separatist feminists in the

1980s to realise that philosophies of gender superiority can lead to fantasies (or realities) of the 'inferior' sex being held captive for breeding.

Men and women need to deal with one another on an intellectual level, however difficult that might seem. But I expect people who disagree to be worthy opponents. If there's a serious point to make, is self-parody the way to go? Andrew Tate is either an idiot or he has missed his calling in comedy. There's a word at the right of the screen, on the set behind him. The word is TAT. It's the TATE logo with the E lopped off by the framing of the camera. How on earth did he allow that? And why is he inviting cancer tomorrow with those Savile-trumping cigars while eating small girls' cereal?

Could it be that he's being controlled by some Master of Mayhem who wants to provoke a swing to the right, and performing these antics is the only way he can tell us? Poor puppet Andy.



Back to a Botanic Future

GILL GOLDENBERG, whose love of gardens stems from her dad's productive oasis, explores plans to take horticulture forward to the past

Hastings Botanic Garden is a visionary project with links to Marianne North – possibly the most important and famous resident of Hastings you might never have heard of. Following my father's gardening - growing vegetables to sustain us, and cultivating a passion for azaleas - inspired me to find out more.

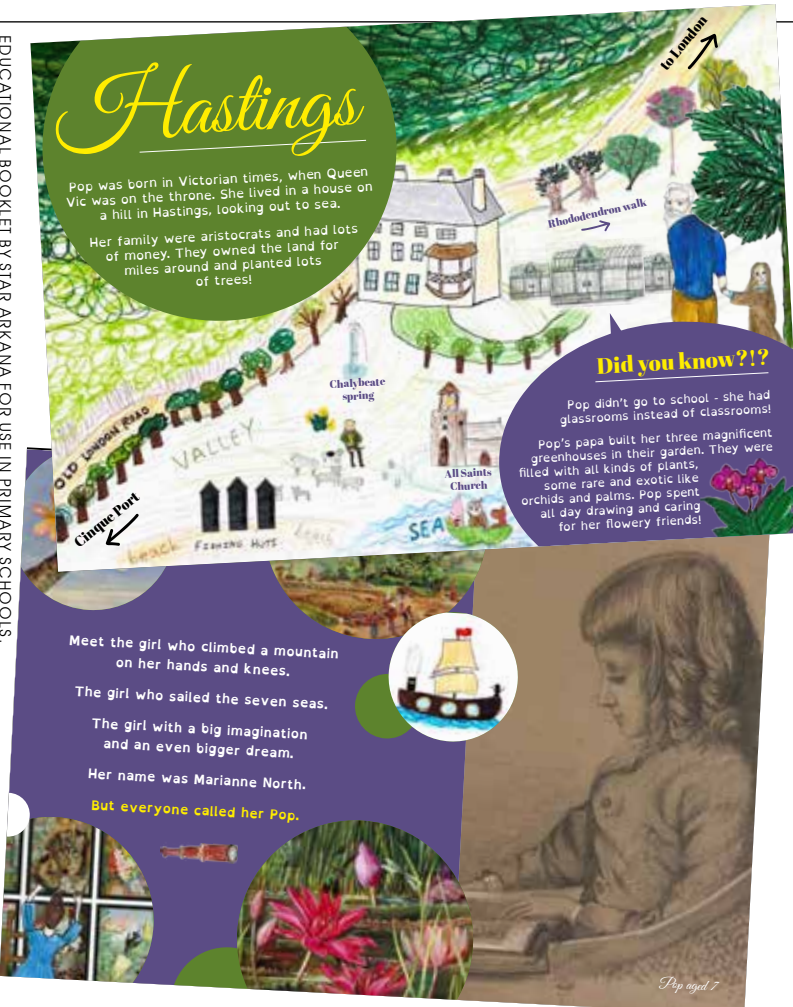
I met with Lee Piper, one of five directors helping founder, Alexander Wilberforce, to make this visionary community project a reality for Hastings. "Three years ago I joined this fantastic community project, having previously known nothing about Marianne North." But is this visionary project realistic? Will it happen?

2030 will mark the 200-year anniversary of Marianne North's

birth, and also the target for the finished Botanical Garden in Hastings. Like everything else this company has done, this is only achievable because of the extensive planning, the economic impact assessment, the involvement of key partners, and an understanding of what the Botanic Gardens could do for Hastings and the people who live here. "Hastings has had more than its share of white elephants, but this is not one of them."

The project is a Company Limited by Guarantee rather than a charity, run on a not-for-profit basis. Everyone on the board is a volunteer, including Lucy Abbot, Gilda Silva, Laetitia Yapp and Sophie Ansar.

There is a clear path of progres-



sion laid out to reach the final goal. Firstly, it is raising funds. The initial target is to raise £2,500 which will be matched by East Sussex County Council, which will raise about half the cost of the initial concept design. The finished centre will be "a major asset for Hastings", according to a director of Kew Gar-

den here, starting in the 1870s and culminating in the 1904 newspaper supplement with the design opposite Warrior Square, with the south end of White Rock sold to Hastings Borough Council on the condition that it was used for recreation or as a Winter Garden."

Why is Marianne North so important? She came from a wealthy and 'respectable' Hastings family, but she defied all the conventions of the early Victorian era. She was passionate about plants and wildlife and was an accomplished artist. After her father died, she travelled solo to 15 countries, capturing in oil paintings – which in itself was contrary to conventions about representing botanical specimens – all manner of plants and wildlife. She warned of habitat loss and the need for biodiversity, long before it became the critical issue it is today. So important were her botanical studies in establishing specific species around the world, that five plant species have been named after her with the *Northia* genus. You can visit the gallery in Kew Gardens – devoted solely to exhibiting over 800 of her paintings.

The company funds events like The Garden Festival held at White Rock last summer, by applying for grants and seeking the support of Hastings Borough Council. They are already planning for events in 2025. Community events like a talk by insect specialist Professor Dave Goulson at East Sussex College on 25 October 2024 have been organised to coincide with Marianne

North's birthday on 24 October 1830. Summer events like The Garden Festival are more about engaging with Green Space groups, enabling them to showcase their endeavours to engage communities and inspire people to get involved in green initiatives.

The renowned architects, Mizzo Studio, who specialise in using sustainable building practices, are on board with the project, having met with senior council officials in February 2022 to discuss the project. Fittingly, they have completed two projects in Kew Gardens itself. The financial viability of the project, driven by Alexander Wilberforce's passion to see the project become a reality, has been established through realistic advice from other botanical gardens in the UK. Given the link through The Marianne North Gallery in Kew Gardens, and Kew having a Sussex connection at Wakehurst Place, it would seem fitting that the link between Hastings and these places could grow stronger as the scheme develops.

In addition to the annual events organised, the vision for the project is kept alive through education. Sophie Ansar's daughter Star, a writer, researcher and composer, goes into schools to talk about Marianne North. The importance of engaging with young people is recognised and acted on with the same passionate enthusiasm evident throughout the company.

White Rock is the preferred location for a number of reasons. As mentioned above, the creation of a 'Winter Gardens' for Hastings was discussed several years before Marianne North's death. More significantly, the southern edge of White Rock was sold to Hastings Borough Corporation in 1903 on the condition that "It shall be used solely as a site for a Municipal Buildings Winter Gardens and recreation grounds." Well, the bowling green is there, the Falaise Gym is there, but not The Winter Gardens. Not yet. Watch this space.

For more, visit hastingsbotanicgarden.org, or MarianneNorth-Centre on Facebook or [hastingsbotanicgarden](https://www.instagram.com/hastingsbotanicgarden) on Instagram.



A Magical Pantomime Adventure

SARAH MILNE

Some of my most treasured childhood memories are of Christmas in Hastings with my grandparents, going to see the pantomime at White Rock Theatre. I loved the thrill of dressing up and feeling so grand at the theatre, which was festive with tinsel, lights, and Christmas trees. The excited anticipation for the start of the show, clutching boxes of Smarties. Cheering as the curtain rose on dancers twirling around brightly coloured sets as Buttons, Dick Whittington, Friar Tuck, or Snow White led them in the opening song. I loved the fun of joining in - cheering, booing the baddies, audi-

ence participation, scrambling around to find sweets or streamers and hoping to get a sprinkling from the foam custard pies.

I haven't been to a pantomime in many years and felt a real sense of nostalgia as I settled into my seat to watch the opening night of this year's White Rock Pantomime *The Magical Pantomime Adventures of Peter Pan*, Polka Pantomime's inaugural Hastings production.

The story begins in London where the Darling children, led by Emily Steel (AKA Gladiator Dynamite) as Wendy, lament not having seen Peter for some time and wish for a new adventure in Neverland. Their hopes are soon to be realised when Peter flies in to seek their help rescuing the lost children from the

clutches of evil Captain Hook. The audience is also invited to help Peter, the children and Tinks (played by *Coronation Street*'s Alexandra Mardell) to find the Lost Children and restore peace and joy to Neverland. The journey is shared by a motley crew of pirates and adventurers along with a mermaid.

This is traditional family pantomime, complete with slapstick, audience involvement and many, many laughs. From the first performance alone, it seems clear that no two shows will be the same. For me, the biggest laughs came from White Rock stalwarts Ben Watson and Tim McArthur as Smee and Hook. They have been playing panto together on this stage for many years; their interaction and clowning had me in stitches, especially their professionalism when going off-piste with mishaps and ad lib. This is a show for all children, young and old. I don't want to give the game away and spoil the many surprises. Go and see for yourself and have some fun.

The Magical Pantomime Adventures of Peter Pan is showing at White Rock Theatre until 31 December



Left to Right: Khalil Patwa, Stuart Griffiths (on sax), Otti Albiezt, Andy Beresford

Piper Hosts pip

BEN THOMPSON

Every now and again, you see something that's different and special. At pip's first gig - appropriately enough, at the Piper (supporting El Khat back in October) - Otti Albiezt's fluid drums embraced the other three musicians on the stage like a loving octopus. Stuart Griffiths' early career alto sax somehow managed to combine vulnerability with lethal menace, and the spectacle of jazz double bassist Andy Beresford dealing with the electric interventions of Khalil Patwa was a treat for the eyes as well as the ears.

In the run up to their eagerly awaited second show (in the White Rock Hotel Basement on 9 January) which will mark monthly jazz night Berth of the Cool's transition from a vinyl-only dj event to a platform for some of the area's more experimentally minded musicians, I asked

each member of the group to explain their function in pip and how what they do there relates to music they have made previously.

"I've played double bass in mostly jazz/groove settings before," notes Beresford, "So it's quite a thing for me to create something coherent and then have the groove carpet pulled from under my feet by sudden anarchic interjections from my bandmates, but hopefully what comes out is a sound that's fresh." Patwa's more poetic vision of what he brings to the table - "I use my bass guitar and effects box to add texture and rhythm, like a wind that's now fragranced because of the flowers it's blown" - gives you some idea of the contrasts in personality and musical provenance that make this group such an intriguing prospect.

"At the core is nothing but flow," explains moonlighting BEAU frontman and solo artist Albiezt. It's clear that pip's short name has some long stories behind it, not least in the raw melodic drift of paratrooper-turned-war-photographer Stuart Griffiths' alto sax. His deconstructed military melodies are a way of channeling traumatic experiences in combat zones from Northern Ireland to the DR Congo. "I came back to the saxophone after many years in the wilderness and undergoing therapy for PTSD," Griffiths explains; "and when I'm playing it all my problems seem to lift away." He'd hoped to join the regimental band after the Thatcher government's cuts put paid to his school music lessons. Things didn't work out that way, but now he's making up for lost time on an instrument bought for him by the Royal British Legion. If that's not the circle of life, I don't know what is.



Stand up for White Rock

Hastings Comedy Festival presents the second night of their winter stand-up comedy programme at the White Rock Studio, on 11 January. There will be live comedy from Suzi

Ruffell and Dinesh Nathan, hosted by Maureen Younger.

With five sell-out runs at the Edinburgh Fringe and a National Comedy Awards nomination for Best Stand-Up Show, suited and booted Suzi Ruffell is a force to be reckoned with. She has made multiple radio and TV appearances, and a clip from her show *Keeping It Classy* for the BBC gained over 44 million views online. Fans will also know Suzi for her podcasting. She's the co-host of *Like Minded Friends* with Tom Allen, and hosts her own *OUT With Suzi Ruffell*. She also co-hosts the smash-hit *Big Kick* energy podcast with fellow comedian and footie fan Maisie Adam.

Dinesh Nathan won South Coast Comedian Of The Year and was a

finalist at the Komedia New Act competition and the coveted Leicester Mercury Comedian Of The Year competition. In 2022 he appeared on BBC Three's *New Comedian of the Year* awards and Comedy Central Live.

MC for the night is Maureen Younger. In 2023 Maureen came third in the British Comedian of the Year awards. In 2024 she was one of the acts performing at the Best of British Showcase at the Adelaide Comedy Festival. Maureen performs UK-wide, and is known for her quick wit and sharp audience interaction. She has also gigged in German and French.

Tickets, £17, hastingscomedyfestival.com. Doors 7:15pm, show starts 8pm Age: 16+.



Suzi Ruffell

The Discreet Charm of the Disturbingly Brilliant

VICTORIA KINGHAM

Coruscating is perhaps an overused word in the context of jazz writing, but it's easy to see why. It's rhythmic, internally balanced, sibilant – an onomatopoeic description of music that's difficult to pin down, but driving, exciting and unexpected.

Empirical's music has rightly been called 'sophisticated'. Dolphy's *Gazelloni* for instance. "We've been playing this for fifteen years," explained bassist and founder-member Tom Farmer, "and it's never come out the same way twice." Indeed it's hard to imagine any of

their material (mostly their own) coming out the same way twice: one of its key features is a highly responsive, extended improvisational structure which seems to the listener only barely contained. This effect is partly due to the complexity of the melodies, and wouldn't be possible in the hands of less gifted musicians. They pay homage to Dolphy, Cecil Taylor, Ornette, who in the 1960s extended the boundaries of jazz definition; in the twenty-first century, Empirical continue that extension.

Hyper-aware of each other's inventions, core members Tom Farmer, Shaney Forbes, and Nathaniel Facey have played together since

2007. While the instrumental line-up could be called conventional, melodic control flows between them with an illusion of ease that is possible only because of their exceptional individual abilities. Nathaniel Facey (professor!) demonstrates a rare, glistening, cascading fluency on alto, drummer Shaney Forbes plays fast, tight, impeccable patterns and melodic lines – his prime solo, in their final number, was a triumph of controlled brilliance. Tom Farmer's bass playing is melodic, intricate, dramatic. The input of guest vibes player, Jonny Mansfield, was marvellously responsive, restrained, elegant.

There's a dedication there, a search for honesty of output, to make a difference, that is always characteristic of the best jazz. And there's a philosophy behind this combo that makes them stand out from the crowd – one of their album titles was *Tabula Rasa*, indicating the blank slate (of John Locke's original philosophical Empiricism) on which they could put down new forms. Their latest album, *Wonder is the Beginning*, is taken from Socrates, 'Wonder is the beginning of wisdom'. Let them keep on wondering, keep on beginning, and keep on presenting the - coruscating.



Nathaniel Facey in Full Swing



Frank Moon with Oud

St Leonards Steam Ahead

VICTORIA KINGHAM

Though this may sound like the gratuitous praise of a faithful follower, in fact there are excellent reasons for Max Baillie's centrality in our local music scene. First, you only have to listen to any of his casually superb renderings of Bach sonatas to realise that he is one of a select few who can transmit to their audience the eternity of Bach, in the same way that great actors convey the eternity of Shakespeare. It comes from more than just accurate rendition, difficult enough. It comes through years of study and a scholarly understanding of the age of the composition and the agelessness of the art.

Second, like a number of gifted

musicians living here, Baillie is committed to the idea of helping to make our locality well known as a premier musical hub. "I believe in this," he says, addressing a crowded room. "It feels very special." He has recently returned from a 40-day European tour with the composer Max Richter. This atmosphere of creative commitment in our local area to all of the arts, particularly music, helps to make the town an endlessly interesting place to live.

At the St Leonards Concerts social event at Crown House, there was a fine interval of music from Max and his Fritz Brothers associate Frank Moon, whose moon-pale, rather reticent appearance belies his multi-instrumental virtuosity. He gave an impeccable performance, on the

oud, of a traditional Andalusian tune called Lamma Bada Yatathanna (*When My Love Begins to Sway*), then later equally impeccably transferred to a Django Rheinhardt style guitar together with Baillie on violin, *Sweet Georgia Brown*.

The event was a fundraiser that also gave Baillie the opportunity to thank those who have worked for St Leonards Concerts, and to announce some of the events he has planned for next year. Confirmed performers will include the glorious singer Alice Zawadzki, celebrated Ukrainian viola player Max Rysanov, and Kit Downes (well known on the jazz circuit), who will take part in a contemporary music program. There will also be a traditional chamber music evening, and a tribute to Rebecca Clarke, a neglected but gifted composer active during the 1920s. Paolo Pandolfo, who has been described as the 'Paganini of the Viola da Gamba' has also agreed to come down to Hastings later in the year.

We can therefore look forward to another year of first-class concerts here in Hastings and St Leonards, presented with pure joy.

If you aren't already on the St Leonards Concerts email list for information about times and places in 2025, contact Max Baillie at stlconcerts@gmail.com. For further details and up-to-date events listings see the web site at stlconcerts.co.uk A review of a previous concert featuring singer Alice Zawadzki can be seen at hastingsindependentpress.co.uk/articles/culture/arts/love-mania-transfiguration.



A Christmas Carol, in the Tradition

VICTORIA KINGHAM watched A Christmas Carol at Rye Creative Centre

Rye is a bit far afield for our very local newspaper. However Duke's Theatre Company are always an exception and this production was well up to their usual high standard. Five actors and a ventriloquist's dummy played a multitude of characters, entirely in the spirit of the original, if that isn't too much of a play on words.

Duke's is a completely professional outfit, and what they present is decidedly not just shouty local theatre. They offer songs, dance, tableaux, high drama, and scene

changes impeccably interwoven into the whole, all carried out by the actors themselves, usually in the open air. In this one-and-a-half-hour indoor show, surprisingly faithful to the original story, they presented a mobile cast of about a dozen, and several ghosts. They even succeeded in eliciting sympathy for Tiny Tim, despite the fact that dummies are always a bit creepy. Mercifully he didn't ask God to bless us, every one. There was also a gloriously anachronistic snow globe which became a symbol

of Ebenezer Scrooge's moral recovery and hope, presented as it was, scene by scene, from sister to lover to nephew to Ebenezer and back to Tiny Tim.

Make em laugh, make em cry, make em wait, recommended Dickens' mate Wilkie Collins, advising aspiring writers on marketing

their work to Victorian audiences. A Christmas Carol in its own time did all these things and gave Dickens an everlasting place in British literary history. And while Duke's is a contemporary company with modern dramatic ideas, it has absorbed and used the best traditions of English travelling theatre com-

panies from the 13th century onwards.

A Christmas Carol is currently sold out touring the North of England, but if you can get as far as Crowborough you can see it on 27 or 28 December headukestheatrecompany.co.uk/briar-house-barns



COMING SOON!

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EMAIL : pipshastings@gmail.com

Flatland Developments

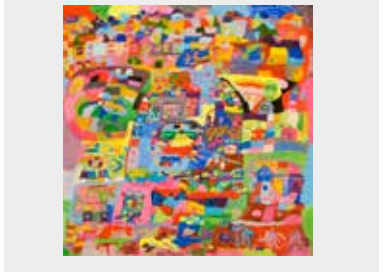
Flatland, an artists' space and project in Bexhill, are currently completing the first phase of works reconfiguring their gallery space. They are preparing for the launch of BARC (Bexhill Artist Research Centre), which will become the home for their development pro-

grammes, and will also house their founding collection of catalogues, artist-made publications, and archival material, all of which will become a resource accessible to artists in the East Sussex region.

BARC is the place where they will host research residencies in their library, and facilitate think-tank sessions with artists to continue their vital work on the South Coast, developing more sustainable futures to enable emerging artists to make ambitious next steps in their careers. BARC was officially opened by Laetitia Yhap on 14 December, following the generous donation of her own artist research library.



Skew (2024), Oil on canvas, 36.4 x 50.3cm.



De La Warr Pavilion is pleased to present Red, Blue, Up, a major new exhibition of paintings and drawings by Bexhill-based artist, Michelle Roberts, in the First Floor Gallery this coming Spring. This solo exhibition is programmed in collaboration with award-winning arts charity Outside In, following the artist's first prize in its national open exhibition, Humanity, in 2023, and Project Art Works, a neurodiverse collective of artists and activists based in Hastings, of which Roberts is a member. Red, Blue, Up follows Roberts' participation in DLWP's 2015 group exhibition, In the Realm of Others.

Red, Blue, Up will show at De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, from 22 February to 1 June 2025.

Lola and Bill

You know nothing about me... so tell me about yourself

My father came from a family of scientists in Bucharest, but I never really knew him...

My mother was the star of the greatest trapeze act in the history of the Latin American Circus...

D. Reddie

BOOKBUSTER REVIEW

Hellebore's 2024 Yuletide Hauntings & other Occult and Uncanny Zines

REVIEW BY TIM BARTON

On December 7th this year, Bookbuster ran a stall at the Mint House in Pevensey. This was a great venue for an esoteric fayre, and this one, 'Making Misrule', is just their latest makers' market. Alongside crafts, tarot stalls, and tattooists, there was folk-music and a mummers play: Hastings was well represented. In the evening, the fabulous Goblin Band had a sold-out concert, playing a variety of folk-music of the British Isles.

The contemporary folk-revival has not lost any momentum, and, amongst the best-selling books and zines, pride of place still goes to *Hellebore* and *Weird Walk*. The former just put out their second Yuletide special, already shifting fast. It follows hot on the heels of their twelfth issue, 'story-telling' themed, which landed just in time for Samhain.

The first piece in issue 12 covers 1980s 'dark fantasy', featuring Bowie as the Goblin King in *Labyrinth*, and other cult movies, including *The Dark Crystal*, and *The Company of Wolves*. Other pieces discuss Robin

Hood, Tam Lin, and the Fairy Queen, plus features on storytellers Susanna Clark and Alan Garner.

A WARNING TO THE CURIOUS

The *Hellebore* Yule special, 'a summoning of seasonal terrors', has the wonderfully named Verity Holloway 'summoning the spirit' of the Black Prince of Cornwall. There are

also articles by Keri O'Shea on the Woman in Black; John Callow on the black dog of Isle of Man's Peel Castle; and editor Maria J Perez Cuervo spooking us out about Uncanny Children. Other essays here give us an eldritch peek at yuletide hauntings, ghosts sightings, spiritualism and other 'metaphysical mysteries'. As ever, *Hellebore* is a quality zine, and has excellent artwork throughout.

Weird Walk's latest offerings are a taster for Ben Edge's super new book *Folklore Rising*, in the form of a highly illustrated zine entitled 'Folklore Activist', and pamphlet, 'Cromlech', about the kistvaen named 'Devil's Den' in Wiltshire. This is one of the UK's best dolmens. Its history is discussed, alongside copious and moody photographs. A must for the 'modern antiquarian' fans.

New zines are popping up all the time alongside these classic publications. Two of the more recent ones are *Wort* and *Occulture*. The latter is subtitled 'a warning to the curious', and they have issued their third and fourth zines this year, one a Special, the 'cinema issue', and also volume 2 of their 'ordinary' edition, this one themed 'the devil's party'. The zines all feature ace collage art, and in this latest offering talk about 'mass possessions', satanism, 'the demonic feminine', and pieces on the devil and demons. George Parr writes of the devil in the English landscape, calling him 'Britain's biggest loser'.

A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE PAST AND FUTURE

Meanwhile, *Wort*, 'a journal of radical, rooted relational herbalism', hits its second issue. This has poetry and fiction, but primary esoterically inclined non-fiction. Katie Hastings (not from Hastings!) and Sinead Fortune write on 'saving seeds'. Katie tells about a Welsh seed-saving collective, Llafur Ni, who are reviving rare 'black oats'; Sinead tells about the 'seed sovereignty programme UK'. Then we get a feature on the 'Palestinian Heirloom Seed Library', based in the West Bank. Clearly, they are somewhat belea-

guered by their neighbours who show no respect for the past and target artefacts that show a long history for Arab people there. Consequently the collective running the project seek to preserve seeds from the Makhroul Valley, an area that has signs of irrigation systems going back 4000 years. 'Preserving and propagating seeds draws a bridge between the past and future.' Other articles cover 'planet medicine and the tarot', 'foraging as resistance; an artist's use of woad, 'Slavic oak', Hasujiku Tanaka on the ginkgo tree, and more.

Hellebore's blurb describes the zine as a 'tribute to the supernatural richness of Britain'. This is, I

think, true of most of this new generation of folkloric zines. They fit right in with the spectrum of contemporary culture from Mark Fisher's *Weird & the Eerie*, through hauntology, psychogeography, and Julian Cope's antiquarian writings, to more practical esoterica as represented by *Wort*, and the resurgence of interest in 'folk horror', especially in both cinema – nicely book-ended by *the Wicker Man* and *Midsommer* – and zine culture. Long may it last. Happy Yuletide, one and all!

All zines reviewed available from Bookbuster, 39 Queens Road, Hastings TN34 1RE



POETRY CORNER

AND ALL BECAUSE YOU IGNORED A COMMA

ALISON YOUNG

I started to write you a message but I couldn't think what to say;
I wrote, "Hi," your name, and pressed send by mistake
But you didn't wait to see what I had to say –
You replied with a message of your own
And that was how it started – and how glad I am;
And all because you ignored a comma

CROSSWORD CORNER

Across

- 1. Some broadcast levies paid for stronghold (6)
- 3. Smile and leave foreigner in Mexico (6)
- 4. Pull phone network for American (6)

Down

- 1. A horse in clay becomes sticky (6)
- 2. Uncover former model (6)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 5 of The HIP List

1					2
	Hastings Independent Five-Clue Cryptic Crossword				
3					
	No. 267 by Peat Poser				
4					

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← Transition Town Potluck Supper ↑ Yellow sticker berries

Festive Season Food Hacks

FIONA MCGARRY shares eight ways to save money on food this winter

Eat Seasonally: in December, seasonal vegetables include squash, leeks, swedes, cauliflowers, kale and Brussels sprouts, so the prices will be lower than at other times of year. You can also find cheap squash

and pumpkins left over from Halloween. Supermarkets also stock up on Christmas products like cranberries, smoked salmon and nuts and price them competitively. It's well worth checking the special offers at Aldi and Lidl: for example, last week, satsumas were the Lidl 'pick of the week'.

Cultivate your store cupboard: dried food goes a long way and works out cheaper than fresh goods. What can beat a trip to Wonderfill or Trinity Wholefoods to stock up on dried fruit, seeds, beans and pulses, grains and pasta? Having sundried tomatoes in your larder means you can

rustle up some antipasto, a pasta sauce or a salad even if you haven't managed to go shopping.

A recent study by researchers at UCL and the University of Oxford identified beans and peas as "the best meat and milk replacement from nutritional, health, environmental, and cost perspectives". My favourites are black beans (great with pumpkin in a chilli), and butter beans or cannellini (good in a Spanish chorizo stew). You can also use lentils as a cheap, healthy replacement for meat – instead of mince in shepherd's pie, for instance.

Yellow stickers: at this time of year there are a lot of them, and not just on ready meals – even cheese gets sold at knockdown prices. Salads, vegetables and baked goods are often reduced while still in tip top condition, especially the day before a Bank Holiday. Be a bit more wary about buying soft fruit (which may taste fermented), chicken and fish. Check out 'yellow sticker' groups on social media.

Most supermarkets reduce items two or three times during the day with final reductions of between 70% and 90% generally around 5pm (4pm at M&S). Morrisons recommend yellow sticker fans visit their stores at 8pm when in-store cooked products are "dramatically reduced". After you return home with your haul of leftover tortillas, spinach, tomatoes, etc, clear out the freezer and make large quantities of curries, soup, stews and bakes. Keep some for supper and freeze the rest.

Bulk things out: I'm known for buying small amounts of expensive products and adding to them, so they feed the whole family. There are local delicatessens and takeaways that sell intensely flavoured salads, stews and other dishes. So, if I buy a small potato salad with a wonderful garlic sauce, I'll add more potatoes. Lebanese Green Beans in an intense tomato sauce taste even better with extra beans from my allotment. It means you can feed four instead of two people.

Less pricey alternatives: interestingly, supermarkets often price things differently in different aisles. Go for spices in the 'world food' section rather than the 'herbs

and spices' aisle where they may cost twice as much. Stores tend to position the cheaper items on the lower shelves and more expensive items at eye-level. And don't be put off by cheaply priced 'own brands'; according to Good Housekeeping, Aldi's all-butter mince pies at £2.29 for six are the best ones around.

Also, think about what you waste money on. I've started to reduce the amount of cheese I buy and ramp up the pickles and alternative spreads to cut costs.

Use the 'Too Good to Go' app: several local supermarkets, grocers, bakeries and restaurants have signed up to this scheme where leftover food is sold at cheap prices. You reserve a bag of food on the app and collect it at the end of the day. For example, Costa Coffee sells bags of pastries, cakes and sandwiches worth £10.00 for £3.00. It can be a bit of a lucky dip, because you don't always know what you'll get in your 'surprise bag', but you can find excellent bargains from some independent local restaurants like Nur.

Share the load: potluck suppers are amazing! People enjoy being asked to bring food to parties and community or family events if they have clear instructions. Because our family is now so large, one of my offspring came up with the idea of a baked potato night this year. The idea is that we bake a heap of potatoes, and everyone brings a filling of their choice. This way even the fussiest family members are catered for.

Leave things till the last minute: if you can hold your nerve, you could try to bag a bargain when most people have already done their shopping. Shops often slash prices around 2-3pm on Christmas Eve (New Year's Eve for party food), although things can be a bit chaotic. The danger is that the most popular products may have sold out – so you need to be flexible.

After Christmas is a good time to buy leftover turkeys (a friend of mine buys two and keeps them in her freezer for Easter). You can often find panettone going cheap – perfect for panettone bread-and-butter pudding to cheer up a cold January day.

Merry Christmas!



Looking for a 2025 running challenge?

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Eat Write Love

NICKY TORODE & SONJA COLMAN
of Creative Concoctions - a local social
enterprise, boosting creative health

Warm up this windy winter with this nutrition-packed recipe for Green Thai soup using chard – also known as Swiss chard. Read how to boost your gut health with these humble greens! And boost your brain health with a spot of journaling!

Journaling is that free flow and expressive way of writing that can help you get those thoughts and worries out onto the page. Journaling - a recipe you might say, for feeling a little more positive for the wintry months ahead.

JOURNALING #1: Winter Warmer

- Write a list of 10 things that you've done recently that made you feel a little inner glow. From small, seemingly insignificant things to more major things.
- Connected with an old friend, watched a film, bought your favourite food?
- No one's going to read this so drop down deep to your inner self.
- Reflect: What's in your list that you might try to do more often this month?

FUN FACTS

- The ancient Romans, Greeks, and Arabs ate chard, but it was a Swiss botanist by the name of W. D. J. Koch who classified the plant in the 1800s. Thus, the name of his homeland became part of the plant's common name.
- It's a relative of the beetroot.
- It can grow up to 28 inches high.

NUTRITION INFO:

- Chard is a powerhouse of nutrients, and is a good source of fibre:
- Vitamin K – supports heart health and lowering blood pressure
- Vitamin A – supports healthy skin and good eye health
- Vitamins C & E – powerful antioxidants supporting against the risk of cancer and oxidative damage
- Calcium – supports bone health
- Fibre – supports your health

GREEN THAI SOUP (Serves 6)

This is a great soup for supporting the immune system, as well as being

very warming. Full fat Greek yoghurt also brings additional probiotic benefits for your gut health.

The chard is around £1.65 for 200g, with kale and spinach being cheaper: 85p and £1.35 respective-



ly – this will vary depending on where you buy your ingredients and the time of year.

Ingredients:

- 1 large onion, peeled and diced
- 1 large carrot, peeled and diced
- 2 tbsp coconut oil
- 2 cm of fresh ginger, peeled and grated
- 4 large garlic cloves, crushed
- 150g curly kale, washed and tough stems removed
- 200g Swiss chard, washed and chopped, stems removed and chopped
- 300g spinach, washed and chopped
- 1 tsp dried coriander
- 1 large green chilli, kept whole but sliced part way lengthwise in half
- 3 stalks of lemongrass (remove tough bottoms and tops)
- 1 ½ litres vegetable stock
- juice and zest of 1 lime
- sea salt
- a good handful of fresh coriander, stalks and leaves chopped
- 4 tbsp Greek yoghurt or coconut milk
- red chilli, cut into slices for serving

METHOD:

1. Heat the coconut oil in a large pan and then add the onion and carrot and gently cook.
2. Add the ginger and garlic to the pan and mix well into the vegetables.
3. Wash all the green veg and

- remove any tough stalks, add to the pan and cook for a couple of minutes.
4. Add the dried coriander, the fresh green chilli and the lemongrass. Mix in before adding the stock.
5. Let the mixture simmer for about 20 minutes then add the lime juice and zest, some salt to taste and most of the fresh coriander.
6. Simmer for another 5 minutes.
7. Take off the heat, remove the lemongrass and chilli and, using a hand blender, blitz until smooth. (If you would like extra heat, remove the stalk of the chilli and return to the pan to blitz with the rest of the soup.)
8. Finally, stir in the Greek yoghurt or coconut milk.
9. Serve with a little more yoghurt, some coriander leaves and a few pieces of red chilli.

SUBSTITUTES

No fresh greens? Use frozen spinach or other greens (or mix some fresh and some frozen).

You can also use dried ginger or lemongrass – you don't get quite the same level of zing, but you do get the flavour and the nutrient benefits.

STORAGE

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

JOURNALING #2

Tis the Season to Sip Soup...

- Recall a time when soup really was the heart-warming ingredient.
- Was it just you, by yourself, coming in from the cold? A guest you'd invited for dinner? Or a time when you dropped into a friend's house, and they offered a bowl?
- Write into that moment, what were your feelings and thoughts, the tastes, conversations that got stirred in?
- Reflect: Write a one-sentence reflection – what are you reminded of here that might be helpful for the coming season?

JOURNALING # 3

Green Means Go!

- Next time you're food shopping, explore the greens. There are many greens these days: for salads, for stir-fries, soups and stews. Pick up a new green. Give it a go and journal after you've made something with your greens.
- Write this sentence starter and spring into your own thoughts.

At first, I wasn't sure...

22

The Year In Sport 2024

ATHLETICS

At Hastings Athletics Club (HAC) it's been a busy and successful year for the club in every discipline - from local events to international level - as it celebrated its 60th anniversary.

Ten club members featured in the UK top 10 for their age group, and 13 made the top 20 for performances in track, field and road in 2024.

An astonishing 52 athletes made it into the top 10 in the club's own records, with 17 breaking a total of 28 club records between them.

Back in February, athletes of different age groups won medals in indoor track events and, as the cross-country season wrapped up, youth athletes represented their schools and county up to national level. The adult team joined forces with Hastings Runners to lift aloft the cup for the East Sussex Sunday League.

At the highly anticipated Hastings Half Marathon in March, HAC's Grace Baker was first female home, nearly seven minutes ahead of her nearest challenger; Rhys Boorman, also of HAC, came sixth in the men's

race. Tom Chaffin won the mini-run. Track season brought top performances in the youth development league and Southern Athletics league, while the Sussex County Championships produced 12 medals. Rae Le Fay went on to represent Team GB in the 2,000 metres steeplechase - the first HAC athlete to do so at international level in the last ten years. She broke a British Milers Club record on her qualifier at under 20s level, her name now to be etched on the awards board in the clubhouse alongside many club legends.

A surge in interest for field events was well supported, leading to two hammer throwers, Alanna Oakman and Kitti Szabo-Papp, competing nationally at the English Schools championships.

The club hosted not only two very successful league events on the track, but also a 60th anniversary competition and awards ceremony emphasising the longstanding camaraderie among its members. The clubhouse has had a refresh and is now a buzzing social hub at the end of every session. There is huge optimism for 2025.



Grace Baker running for Hastings

FOOTBALL

It's been a tale of three managers at the Pilot Field in 2024 - four if you count the caretaker role played last month by coach Sean Ray. A year ago Chris Agutter was in his second stint at the helm after arriving in October. He steered Hastings United to the fringes of the promotion play-offs at the top of the Isthmian Premier League in the spring, then left for the richer pastures of Worthing, now going well in the Vanarama National League. Danny Bloor, once of Eastbourne Borough, came in May, but was gone by late October. New appointment from the beginning of this month is Danny Searle, former youth coach at West Ham, who is armed with a UEFA Pro Licence and has previous managerial experience at several clubs in the National League.

At the beginning of April, Agutter's team seemed well set to finish in the league's top five, but a disappointing run at the end of the season - only one win in the last five games - meant a final placing of seventh, nine points short of the lowest play-off place. They also disappointed in losing the Sussex Transport Cup Final 3-0 to Horsham at the Amex Stadium. Despite having signed an extension to his contract for the 2024-25 season, Agutter swiftly announced his departure.

Incoming boss Bloor could point to an excellent record at Eastbourne, and came in praising the quality of the playing squad he was inheriting at the Pilot Field, the calibre of the directors and staff he was joining, and the passion of 'U's supporters. Most players were retained from the previous season, though the speed and skill of winger John Ufuah has been sorely missed. And initial results were encouraging, Horsham



Hastings United celebrate goal by Will Harley

being beaten 2-0 on the opening day, followed by an away win at Whitehawk and progress through two rounds of the FA Cup.

However, the team lacked the control in midfield that Agutter had always espoused, and leaked goals in defence. Reverses were suffered both away and at home: cup eliminations were coupled with a slide down the league table to the relegation zone. Bloor was unceremoniously dismissed after an FA Trophy defeat at Hadley on 26 October.

Ray took the reins as interim manager and, like his predecessors,

started with a win, 2-0 at home to Whitehawk. But a fortnight later, with several players less than fully fit, the 'U's suffered a humiliating 9-0 league defeat at Hendon, and it is probably a relief all round that a more travelled manager has now arrived.

The choice of Searle for the managerial job is presumably based upon his record of enhancing youth development. There's clearly scope for that in Hastings, though the standard of playable training facilities may be rather lower than he is used to. Most observers would agree

that there is enough footballing talent available, if the team is set up capably and recovers good fitness levels. Davide Rodari is a proven goalscorer, Adam Lovatt is a hard-working and combative captain in midfield, and young players like George Walker, Freddie Legg and Fin Chapman should improve with experience.

So far, Searle has seen his team score a league cup win on penalties over third-placed Cray Valley PM, a 3-2 away win over Chichester City and a gutsy 1-1 draw away last Saturday at second-placed Billericay.

CRICKET

Hastings & St Leonards Priory cricketers experienced an ultimately unsuccessful return to the Sussex Premier League in 2024 when they were relegated by the narrowest of margins. In other years their record over the season of six victories and nine defeats might have accumulated them enough league points to survive, but they finished just three points short of eighth-placed Bognor Regis.

Needing a victory on the last day at home to runners-up Horsham in order to retain their status, they only got the game going at all by a mopping-up operation after heavy overnight rain. Batting first in a contest reduced to 40 overs per side, Priory scored a total of 165 for seven; Horsham accumulated steadily in reply, but wickets then tumbled under murky skies, and the last over came with nine wickets down and nine runs to win - or eight to tie, which would have been sufficient for Priory's escape. It was not to be: a conclusive boundary was hit off the penultimate ball, and the Hastings side will be playing back in Division 2 next summer.

On the batting front, new captain Harry Scowen led from the front all summer, scoring 556 runs from 14 innings, including two centuries. Caleb Laloo also enjoyed an excellent first season as an opener. But none of the middle order, often required to accelerate the tempo after a sedate start, retained any consistent form, so that the side posted competitive totals on too few occasions.

John Morgan was yet again the pick of the bowlers, taking 22 wickets. Adam Barton gave him good support when available, and Adam Page enjoyed his best season to date as spinner. Aussie recruit Alex Osborne was unable to bowl his leg-spinners with any sort of control, however, and was ultimately released in mid-season. Young all-rounders Seaver Cowley and Iden McCleave had their moments of success with both bat and ball, but lacked the consistency which more experience may bring.

The future of Priory's home ground, Horntye Park, is still in the balance, the plans to dig it up for housing seeming no further forward than this time last year.



John Morgan, pick of the Priory bowlers

RUGBY

With a new chairman Ben Davies, a new coaching duo of Bruce Steadman and Ben Petty, and a new captain, Harry Walker, Hastings & Bexhill have been celebrating their centennial season with eyes on the future as well as the past.

On the pitch, having survived the threat of a second successive relegation in the Kent League in the spring, H & B's first XV have performed well this autumn, chalking up seven victories out of 11 matches in Counties 3. Top three in the division are 2nd XV teams from Tonbridge (Juddians), Tunbridge Wells and Beckenham, but the Hastings team beat Beckenham convincingly in their opening game in September and went down only narrowly 14-17 to Tunbridge Wells a month ago. Defence has been strong – they have conceded less league points than any other team; and when their backs are on song, they can also score freely: New Ash Green were thumped 47-15 at H & B's home ground of Alexandra Academy last Saturday.

The squad is still lacking in num-

bers, short of sufficient replacements when first picks are injured or otherwise unavailable, though those who have come in have generally acquitted themselves well. One boost is the return of Quin McManus after a spell in New Zealand.

Women's and junior/ 'mini' teams have, in the meantime, been thriving. The women have combined to produce a joint team with Seaford. The 'minis' train at the club every Sunday between 9.30 and 11am – playing full contact rugby at under 9, under 10 and under 11 levels. The under 10s won their first game of the Polgrove Salts Cup, defeating Seaford earlier this month.

Lower age-groups play under 'tag' rules, with numbers surging after the club's annual 'bring a friend' day. There will be several festivals of rugby for them to play in early next year. And there is now an under 6s section for children in school Reception and Year 1, learning basic ball control through playing fun and interactive games with a dedicated coach.

Off the pitch the club has held a centenary ball as well as two lunches for former players.



H & B in scrummaging mode

TENNIS

The (mostly) friendly dance of rivalry between the Amherst club in Hastings and The Green in St Leonards continued in 2024 with perennial ups and downs.

In the Tennis Sussex Winter Doubles competition, The Green men's team, boosted by participation of coaches Joe Adams and Ross Cudmore (late of Amherst), were promoted to Division 2 in the spring and have scored two match wins out of three in the current season. Shorn of these players, they're not the same force, as they showed finishing mid-table in Division 8 of the equivalent Summer competition.

Amherst, too, were promoted from Division 5 to Division 4 of the 2023-24 Winter league, with consistent performances by captain Dylan

Preece, Quentin Soucek, Anthony Hickey and Mark Cunnington. They have been struggling, however, at the higher level. In the equivalent Summer Doubles, starting in Division 3, they fielded nine players including several new to first team play, but were unable to win a team match and will play next summer back in Division 4.

On the women's side, The Green were relegated from Division 3 to Division 4 in the spring despite the efforts of their always proficient first pairing, Beaula Page and Amanda Ruck. In the Summer league they finished mid-table in Division 4.

Amherst's women were involved in thrilling finales in both competitions. Needing a 3-1 victory in their final Winter match away at Horsham to be promoted to Division 2,

they won all three matches in third set tie-breaks, Pearl Hare paired with Nikki Crowhurst, Anita Pearce with Jane Garrett. Summer Division 3 was just as tight: again Amherst needed a 3-1 win away against Seaford & Blatchington for equivalent promotion. All four matches went to third set tie-breaks: this time Pearce and Debi Ani won both theirs, but Crowhurst and Hare suffered agonising defeats.

There are no inter-club matches featuring singles play, but Amherst held a highly competitive closed tournament in June. On a day of freakish wind-gusts, Soucek overpowered Hickey in the men's final, while Crowhurst and Hare fought a thrillingly turbulent (though immaculately sporting) contest, just edged by the former in another third set tie-break.



Nikki Crowhurst and Pearl Hare in Amhurst singles final

CRICKET

Graeme Mounsey, RIP

JOHN MORGAN

Hastings & St Leonards Priory cricketers are mourning the death of former president, treasurer and player Graeme Mounsey, who has sadly passed away at the age of 90.

Nobody has done more for the Priory club than Graeme. He was a founder member when Hastings & St Leonards merged with The Priory in 1957 to form one of the strongest clubs in the Southeast, and was captain when it joined the Sussex League in 1971. He featured in many of the club's early successes including the 1974 Kemp Cup win and the 1978 league championship.

He played with distinction in all XIs across the men's teams, primarily as a wily slow left-arm bowler who put fear into the opposition batting line-up, but also a lower order batsman with a century to his name.

By the late 70s, Graeme had dropped to the 2nd XI, but was leading wicket-taker in 1981. He finished his playing career forming a formidable spin bowling attack in the 4th XI with Peter Finch in the noughties, though not before being recalled to the first team as a 65-year-old when the team was hit



by a spin bowling crisis.

Graeme was similarly committed off the field, serving the club in many posts over a cumulative 68 years, as a rigorous and tenacious treasurer (nobody got away with debts to the club), as secretary, and latterly as club president until stepping down earlier this year. He also ran the 100 Club, the draw being the conclusion to many a committee meeting.

From 1974 until 2002, he was the chairman of the Central Cricket Ground Trust, integral in the planning and development of Horntye Park to save senior cricket in the town following the demise of the Central Ground.

Above all, Graeme was a sincere and caring person, eager to help young players and to share his love of the game and the club. He was a regular spectator, greeting fellow cricket lovers with a cheery smile and a polite 'good afternoon'. His loss will be sorely felt.

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