

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



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‘Hastings Three’ Acquitted

KENT BARKER

Three men prosecuted for taking part in a peaceful protest at arms manufacturer General Dynamics have been acquitted of all charges at Brighton Law Courts. Laurie Holden, 72, Clem McCulloch, 33, and Thomas Delves, 25 – known as the ‘Hastings Three’ – were arrested for alleged aggravated trespass on February 29 last year. They were protesting at one of General Dynamics’ two sites in Hastings.

The three told the court that they were there to disrupt the business of the weapons manufacturers and to slow production down. Illustrator Thomas Delves said: “I believed it was the right thing to do to stop the weapons factory in any way I could because it was supplying weapons to a genocide in Gaza.” He described his sit-down protest in front of one entrance as “peaceful but still effective”.

Retired train driver Laurie Holden said: “There was a genocide going on, the ultimate crime against humanity, and General Dynamics was playing a major role in that crime, making a lot of weapons, like 2,000lb bombs.”

The two were arrested for aggravated trespass, but as they were being forcibly removed from the protest, Mr McCulloch said he got upset and decided to stand in their place. “I believed it was the right thing to do,” he said. “I knew General Dynamics manufactured arms and related equipment which were used not just during the genocide but in the years previously, providing ordnance and equipment to the IDF to be used in Palestine.”

After being physically dragged from the protest, they were held in a cell for thirteen hours before being charged under a Section 69 order of “failing to comply with an order from the police to move off land when directed to do so”.

Protest police liaison of-



The Hastings Three - centre front row

HASTINGS & DISTRICT PSC



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EDITOR'S NOTE

We've a whole lot of local news in this issue, beginning with the welcome acquittal of the Hastings Three, following a heavy-handed and authoritarian attempt to criminalise their peaceful public protest. Continuing to represent her constituents effectively, Helena Dollimore has followed her major part in the ousting of the University of Brighton Academies Trust with a robust interrogation of Southern Water's boss, which may encourage the firm to compensate those affected by last year's disgraceful water outage.

The contrasting fortunes of housing feature prominently in the paper, Hastings Commons gained an award for providing affordable accommodation, yet the town has the third-highest home repossession rate in the south-east. We report on residents' proposals for the old bathing pool site, and our features story ponders how to reconcile building more homes with protecting the precious natural environment.

In the Arts section, discover a tea party with angels and a tattooist turned painter along with film, theatre and music reviews and previews.

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News

1 ← ficer PC Freeman told the court he had worked alongside the protest organisers for a number of months and confirmed that all the actions were peaceful. He said that on the day “it was a very peaceful protest and my only concern was the fire exit”.

In court, bodycam footage worn by PC Freeman showed him asking Mr Delves and Mr Holden to move

out of the way of the door, to which Mr Holden replied: “Stopping a genocide is far more important. We want to stop genocide, that’s why we’re here.”

Defence counsel moved to have the charges dismissed on the grounds of ‘no case to answer’ since the three men were simply instructed to move away from an exit they were blocking and not given clear

direction to ‘leave the land’.

After hearing evidence in the case, District Judge Amanda Kelly concluded: “It seems to be agreed that there was no clear order given to the men of what they were being told to do or where to go.” She found all three not guilty.

“This is a total vindication of the Hastings Three,” said Katy Colley, Chair of the Hastings and District

Palestine Solidarity Campaign, which organised the protest. “The Three are heroes. They did what they could to prevent the senseless slaughter of thousands of innocent Palestinians. General Dynamics are the criminals.”

Further demonstrations against the Hastings arms manufacturer are planned.



Police Arrive at General Dynamics Demo



Palestine Solidarity Campaign members vigil outside Hastings Police Station

PHOTOS: HASTINGS & DISTRICT PSC

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trading as **CLUB XS**
having during the past six months carried on the trade or calling of **CLUB OPERATOR** do hereby give notice that it is my intention to apply to **Hastings Borough Council** in the County of East Sussex for the renewal of the licence

authorising me to use or permit the use of premises known as **CLUB XS,**
19-21 PROSPECT PLACE,
HASTINGS, TN34 1 LN as a Sex Establishment, that is to say, a Sex Entertainment Venue.

Any person who desires to object to the renewal of the licence should send to the Executive Director of

Environmental Services ,
Aquila House,Breeds Place,
Hastings, East Sussex,
TN34 3UY not later than 21 days after the date of my application, i.e. the **17 February** a written statement setting out the general terms of the grounds of his or her objections.

Dated this **27th** day of **January 2025**

HASTINGS TIDES						
DATE	HIGH AND LOW TIDES			SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON
FRI 31 JAN	L 6:54am	H 12:13pm	L 7:13pm	7:35	4:47	
SAT 1 FEB	H 0:30am	L 7:35am	H 12:52pm	7:33	4:49	
SUN 2 FEB	H 1:10am	L 8:14am	H 1:33pm	7:32	4:51	
MON 3 FEB	H 1:50am	L 8:51am	H 2:14pm	7:30	4:53	
TUES 4 FEB	H 2:33am	L 9:30am	H 2:59pm	7:28	4:54	
WEDS 5 FEB	H 3:21am	L 10:16am	H 3:52pm	7:27	4:56	FIRST
THURS 6 FEB	H 4:20am	L 11:14am	H 5:01pm	7:25	5:02	
FRI 7 FEB	H 5:38am	L 12:26pm	H 6:27pm	7:23	5:03	
SAT 8 FEB	L 1:00am	H 7:08am	L 1:49pm	7:22	5:05	
SUN 9 FEB	L 2:32am	H 8:38am	L 3:25pm	7:20	5:07	
MON 10 FEB	L 4:05am	H 9:48am	L 4:40pm	7:18	5:09	
TUES 11 FEB	L 5:07am	H 10:38am	L 5:32pm	7:17	5:10	
WEDS 12 FEB	L 5:54am	H 11:18am	L 5:32pm	7:15	5:12	FULL
THURS 13 FEB	L 6:35am	H 11:54am	L 6:52pm	7:13	5:14	

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'Victory' For Hastings Academies

KENT BARKER

Eight Hastings schools and six others across Sussex are to be removed from control of the University of Brighton Academies Trust (UBAT).

In a brief statement on 20 January UBAT said "Trustees have informed the Department for Education of their desire to seek to transfer the academies in the Trust to other Academy Trusts."

It follows revelations last year that UBAT was reserving an excessively high percentage of funding money – 20% in one case – for 'central services'. It led to schools' staff across the academy chain taking industrial dispute with some coming out on strike.

The local schools involved are:

The Hastings Academy, and the St Leonards Academy, the West St Leonards, the Baird the Silverdale and the Churchwood Primary Academies as well as the Dudley Infant Academy and Robsack Wood nursery and primary.

Hastings MP Helena Dollimore said "It has been confirmed that UBAT will no longer run our local schools. This is a victory for the young people of Hastings and Rye, and a vindication of what pupils, parents and teachers have been campaigning for." As HIP reported just before Christmas (Issue 267), Ms Dollimore lobbied the Education Minister, Bridget Phillipson, who agreed to ending the academies' "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". Thus it is a moot point as to whether the government stripped UBAT of its schools or whether the trust pulled out voluntarily before it was pushed.

The news was given a mixed reception by the National Union of Education (NEU) who said "Financial mismanagement, a lack of transparency and insufficient funding of frontline services have damaged UBAT schools." But the union also believes that the whole academy model – introduced by Tony Blair in 2000 – is unsatisfactory.

thority control and for the wider school community, including all unions, to be included in the discussions about the future direction of these schools."

It would seem unlikely that Hastings' UBAT schools will return to local authority control – nationally it is almost unprecedented. However a majority (110 out of 174) of East Sussex County Council's schools are 'maintained' and the Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said recently that she was "open to considering" whether struggling academies can return to local authority control and is reviewing the process for opening new schools. The Department for Education told HIP: "We will now work closely with the Trust, schools and local authorities involved to select the strongest alternative providers for each of the schools and to ensure a smooth transition." but they declined to elaborate.

Meanwhile the government has published its Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill which would move the rules governing academies nearer to those for maintained schools including adherence to the national curriculum and a requirement for new teachers to either have or be working towards qualified teacher status.



Jess Steele

Hastings Commons Wins Housing Prize

CHRIS CONNELLEY

Hastings Commons, the cluster of community businesses behind the refurbishment of Rock House and the Observer Building, and the lead organisation for the Hastings Heritage Action Zone in the town centre, has been announced as a Gold winner in the 2025 World Habitat Awards.

World Habitat is a charity based in Leicester that describes itself as "working internationally to help bring the best housing to people who need it most".

It has been running an award programme for 30 years and this year announced nine international winners, with Hastings Commons the only UK based organisation and one of just two awarded the most prestigious Gold Prize.

Hastings Commons, who are social landlords owning flats on Cambridge Road and in Rock House, are described by World Habitat as "a community-led initiative, including a community land trust, that allows residents of a low-income neighbourhood to own, transform and manage derelict buildings, turning them into secure, sustainable and affordable homes, workspaces, and social hubs for all".

The citation goes on to note, "The enterprise combats the financialisation of housing, increasing affordability and availability whilst empowering the local community."

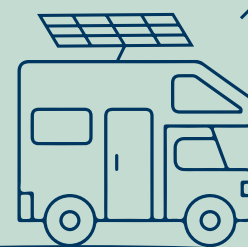
Hastings Commons joins Tanzania Women Architects for Humanity (TAWAH) as a Gold award winner. TAWAH secured theirs for the Mhaga Homes for the Elderly project, a training programme that provides women with construction skills to build "eco-friendly and dignified" homes for the elderly in rural communities in Tanzania.

The Gold Award comes with a £10,000 prize and access to innovation investment and advice from World Habitat's global network. There are seven other winners at Silver and Bronze levels, representing projects in Austria, Australia, Argentina, Algeria, El Salvador, Slovakia and Pakistan.

Dr Jess Steele, the CEO of Hastings Commons, said, "We've been working with local people for many years taking difficult and derelict buildings and retrofitting them into affordable homes and workspace and among other things a youth club all of which will be held in community ownership for ever."

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HBC Housing Partner Bust

HUGH SULLIVAN

Two private housing companies contracted by Hastings Borough Council (HBC) have ceased to trade following a winding-up petition brought by HM Revenue & Customs. Phi Capital Investments Limited (PCIL) and associated company Simply Phi were engaged to identify, acquire and manage properties for letting to homeless households.

The Phi directors have, however, already formed two new companies, Phi Property Acquisition Limited and Phi Technology Solutions Limited, which are expected to take over the respective businesses of

the insolvent companies. A High Court judge adjourned a hearing of the Revenue's winding-up petition in London last week so PCIL could apply for an administration order to enable the transfer.

PCIL and/or Phi Works also provided housing acquisition and management services to Thurrock Council in Essex. According to the Thurrock Nub News, they owe more than £200,000 to the local authority.

The Phi directors issued a statement maintaining that the administration is "as a result of an HMRC tax credit misfiling and not the

result of [their] underlying operational business".

It appears HBC will not be affected by the insolvencies. Unlike the case in Thurrock, they have been paying Phi only at completion of each acquisition or associated works.

A statement on behalf of HBC provides a very positive account of this programme. It says that eighty-four properties have been purchased since August 2023, including ex-local authority houses, homes in multiple occupation and office-to-residence conversions. There are twenty-four more currently in conveyancing.

The council calculates savings in the cost of temporary accommodation amount to £498,000.

The statement adds: "The Council is proud to be providing high-quality homes to offer to its residents – homes that people want to live in rather than paying excessive costs to private landlords for temporary accommodation."

No express confirmation has been given that the HBC programme will continue with servicing from the replacement Phi companies, but it seems implicit in the council statement that this is what's intended.

NEWS IN BRIEF

COUNCIL DRAFT PLAN

Hastings Borough Council (HBC) is inviting responses to its draft 2025-2030 Corporate Plan. The draft plan aims "to make a Hastings where residents are proud of their town and feel safe, valued and heard; where secure housing is available, affordable and energy efficient, and people can live healthy, fulfilling lives with the right skills and education to access good well-paid jobs."

The Council says there are five priorities and associated actions to meet those priorities and the overall aim.

- A financially stable council that delivers high quality, responsive services in cooperation with local people.
- Tackling homelessness and ensuring good quality housing.
- Take action to tackle the climate and nature crisis.
- Make Hastings somewhere that people have a greater pride in place.
- Tackle poverty and inequality.

HBC says the Corporate Plan is being developed in the context of significant financial constraints due to the continuing high levels of need for temporary accommodation. "We are determined to protect frontline services and where possible invest in our priorities. As a consequence, the budget savings proposals build on those that were agreed in February 2024. If you have comments or suggestions for the budget, please share those with us too." The deadline for responses is 3 February.

For more information, search for 'Corporate Plan' at hastings.gov.uk

BIRD FLU IN UDIMORE

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has confirmed a case of avian influenza in poultry at a premises in Udimore, Rye. All poultry on the premises will be humanely culled, and Defra has set up a 3km protection zone around the premises as well as a 10km surveillance zone.

Birds within the 3km zone should be kept housed, not outdoors. No movement of birds or

eggs should take place within, or out of, the 3km zone except under license.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has said that avian influenza is primarily a disease of birds and the risk to the general public's health is very low. All keepers of birds with access to the open air are now required to register their premises. This does not include keepers of birds such as budgies, parrots, cockatiels and finches, where birds are fully housed and cannot fly free.

The government advises that anyone finding small numbers of dead wild birds can dispose of them in household or municipal bins, following the government's safety advice. There is no need to report dead birds unless a large number of them are found in one place.

Dead wild birds can be removed and disposed by searching on GOV.UK or by calling 03459 335577. East Sussex County Council and other local partners are working with Defra to contain further spread.

HASTINGS HOMES REPOSSESSIONS

Hastings has the third highest home repossession rate in the South East, according to government data collated by removals comparison site Getamover. The data spans two decades and the figures were compared to the population of each local authority to determine the repossession rate per 100,000 households. Out of 71 local authorities, Hastings rated as the third highest with a total of 553 repossessions or an average of 607 per 100,000. The worst area for repossessions was Medway with an average of 658, while the area with the fewest repossessions was Folkestone and Hythe with just an average of 15. David Burrows, head of Getamover said, "Recent findings from Shelter and HSBC UK, carried out by YouGov, further underscore this crisis, revealing that 21% of individuals struggled with mortgage or rent payments in 2023, and 3.1 million people feared the possibility of eviction. Addressing these issues requires a multi-fac-

eted approach, combining affordable housing initiatives with robust tenant protections to safeguard households."

SHOPLIFTING CRIME SOARS

Shoplifting offences in Hastings have risen by an alarming 44.5% in the past year, the latest crime statistics reveal. There were 818 incidents recorded in the 12-month period to November 2024, accounting for 7.5% of all crime in the town.

Meanwhile, claims by the County's Police Commissioner that she is 'successfully tackling anti-social behaviour' have been refuted by the statistics. Katy Bourne, Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for East Sussex, says she has achieved "astonishingly high levels of success" with the Immediate Justice initiative and is continuing "to restore community confidence".

But the official statistics, correlated by 'Plumplot', show that anti-social behaviour is up 6.7% in the Hastings area, amounting to 15.4% of all local crimes, and is 23% higher than the national average. In East Sussex overall anti-social behaviour was up nearly 12%.

The Immediate Justice scheme was initiated by the Sunak government in 2023 with people committing anti-social behaviour being made to repair the damage from 48 hours after their offence. Government funding for the two-year scheme has now ended, but the PCC says that she will continue it with money from her own budget.

Commissioner Bourne says that most current Sussex Immediate Justice (IJ) referrals are for youths aged 11-17. However, Sussex also had over 70 adults come through the programme. Typical offences are assaults, criminal damage and vandalism, theft from shops, drug possession and public order offences. By the end of 2024, the County IJ Taskforce had dealt with over 416 referrals with "incredibly high compliance rates for reparative activities".

The latest crime statistics for Hastings published in January also show that possession of weapons increased by 18%, theft from the



person by 10% and public order crime by 3.1%. On the positive side, bicycle thefts were down 62%, vehicle crime was down 23%, criminal damage and robbery by 11%, and violent crime was also down by 6.2%.

Source: plumplot.co.uk/City-Hastings-crime-stats

HOSPITAL PATIENTS SHOULD BE FURIOUS

Hospital rebuilding programmes in the Hastings area have been postponed until at least 2037, putting them in a group with the lowest priority of any in the country.

Eastbourne District, the Conquest and Bexhill Community hospitals are to be given makeovers costing between £1.5 and £2 billion, but work is highly unlikely to start for at least 12 years.

The Department of Health said the national hospital rebuilding programme would be carried out in 'waves of delivery'. The Hastings hospitals are at the bottom of wave three, with the longest delays.

Health Secretary Wes Streeting put the blame squarely on the last Conservative government: "the NHS was starved of capital in the 2010s, with £37 billion under-investment over the 2010s. This lack of investment meant the UK construction sector did not have the appetite and capacity to build the number of concurrent hospitals required to deliv-

er 40 new hospitals by 2030 when this promise was made.

But he said the promises were never going to be kept by the last government. "If I was shocked by the state of this programme, patients ought to be furious. They also desperately need new buildings and new hospitals."

TRAFFIC CHAOS TO CONTINUE

The start of road works on the A259 at the junction of Denmark Place and Albert Road have caused long tailbacks and traffic disruption across much of the seafront. Drivers have been told to expect long delays in the area until 14 March when the works are due to be complete.

The roadworks are part of the Local Growth Fund Hastings and Bexhill Movement and Access Package. The works include the removal of the existing pedestrian islands on each approach to the junction, along with traffic signals and the installation of two new pedestrian islands, carriageway surfacing, drainage works and street lighting upgrades.

Balfour Beatty says it may be necessary to close Pelham Street for short periods of time during the works, which will add to the traffic chaos. Bus services may also be impacted during the overnight closures. Access to the road will be restricted for residents while the works are in progress.

West Marina Consultation Jump-started

HUGH SULLIVAN

A coalition of design and community groups has unveiled proposals for the future of the ex-bathing pool and holiday camp at West Marina. At a recent exhibition and workshop, West St Leonards Forum, Hastings Urban Design and Save Our Bathing Site (SOBS) set out their preferred ideas, designs and models of the development for public viewing and discussion. The move follows an announcement last November that council-backed developers, County Gate, were “looking forward to commencing a full programme of public consultation over the next few months” before finalising development proposals and submitting a planning application. They revealed that they had obtained Environment Agency approval, though not what it was for. Since then no scheme or outline has been forthcoming from them, or from the council.

Back in 2021, Hastings Borough Council (HBC) granted a lease to County Gate Properties to “regen-

erate” the site at West Marina. It was described by Peter Chowney, then lead councillor for finance, as a ‘joint venture’. He said the scheme would “include proposals for new homes, tourist accommodation, artists’ studios, children’s play, cafes and a slipway, in a development that will be designed to recognise the challenges of climate change and the council’s policy to make Hastings carbon neutral by 2030.” He also promised involvement with the local community, though over the past three years the people of West St Leonards have yet to be consulted in any meaningful way. A spokesperson for HBC said last week that council officers have been “in regular contact” over this period, but neither the council nor County Gate have made any further disclosure of what they intend.

Anna Sabin, chair of the West St Leonards Forum, says that the aim is “to rehearse the possibilities” for the site within the parameters set by the lease agreement, although no resident or community group has actually seen it. With regard to new homes, for instance, it’s suggested



West Marina site. Could it end up like the Iceberg Swimming Club on Bondi Beach?

that they could all be in a tall apartment block built on the old car wash site, with sports facilities – squash courts, table tennis and kiteboard hire and tuition – on the ground floor. A beachside children’s play area could be established at the east end of the site (nearest the town centre). One robustly built café with a direct sea view and a terrace connected to the pebbles would be enough. A slipway for launching motor boats and jet skis? There’s general opposition, though three walls around a tidal pool, much hoped for, might be a possibility.

She added: “HBC needs the development to provide homes, but also to have it enhance life for existing local residents and the whole town rather than most of the gains going to the developer.” Representatives of County Gate’s dedicated West St Leonards Marina Limited

(WSMLL) were not formally invited to last Saturday’s event, but local councillors did attend amongst an impressive turn-out of interested residents. Council leader Julia Hilton and housing portfolio member Glenn Haffenden are due to meet WSMLL in the next few weeks.

Water Compensation Reviewed

PAUL McLAUGHLIN

In a bruising exchange with local Labour MP Helena Doolimore in Parliament, the CEO of Southern Water, Lawrence Gosden, pledged to review the decision not to pay compensation to residents and businesses of Hastings and St Leonards affected by the water outage last year.

Mr Gosden appeared before the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee on 21 January as a part of an inquiry into reforming the water sector. He was challenged by Ms Doolimore to explain why Southern Water “has the worst record of any water company when it comes to water outages.” He was also asked why the company’s response to last year’s water failures had been so poor.

The MP was critical of unfulfilled promises of bottled water, insufficient water stations, and severe traffic gridlock in the town, saying the impact on local communities was unacceptable, and the situation was “unbearable” for

parents with babies. She also highlighted how the White Rock Hotel had had to fill buckets of water from the sea to flush its toilets. Mr Gosden agreed Southern Water’s response had been “completely unacceptable”, adding “the level of impact and the duration of the incidents were inexcusable.”

Ms Doolimore challenged the CEO to explain why, if his company’s response had been so inadequate, he had taken a bonus of £160,000 last July. Mr Gosden argued that things had started to improve under his leadership. The MP asked why no compensation has been paid to residents in Hastings, “including myself” who have had to pay water bills even “for the days when we did not have any water.” Mr Gosden explained that under the current rules “no compensation was due.” He admitted that this was “absolutely crazy” and that Southern Water had voluntarily put forward £1 million to support local community initiatives.

The Labour Government is currently establishing new rules which will require water companies to pay

compensation to businesses and households whenever there is service disruption of more than 12 hours. Currently these will not be back-dated. However, it seems the imminent introduction of a stricter regulatory environment is already having an impact on the thinking of water company bosses. Southern Water, for example, has pledged £9.7 million to those who experienced water failures across Southampton in December, equating to about £160 per household.

When challenged as to why similar payments were not available to residents of Hastings and St Leonards, Mr Gosden said he would look again at the issue: “what I am promising you is to review that and to go further.” He refused to be drawn on a timescale but said he would be meeting with Hastings Borough Council to discuss the issue of compensation “this week.”

After the meeting, Ms Doolimore welcomed Mr Gosden’s apology for Southern Water’s failings, from sewage dumping to flooding to outages, and his commitment to look again at compensation. She added, “I am pleased that I was able to hold the CEO of Southern Water to account and push him to award compensation to 30,000 of my constituents who were affected by the Hastings water outage in May last year.”

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WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?✉ **#Letter****IN DEFENCE OF GAZA**

Thank you for publishing Mr Bennett's letter, *In Defence of Israel* (HIP 268) albeit with a disclaimer. If nothing else, it does present an opportunity to set the record straight.

The authoritative tone of the letter masks many falsehoods. He begins explaining that absence of 'intent' means no genocide is taking place. This ignores the fact that the presence of 'intent' has already been confirmed, not least by 'Law for Palestine' who have researched and documented over 500 pieces of evidence clearly showing 'intent'. It is partly the presence of such clear 'intent' that has led to the ICJ's ruling that it is "plausible" Israel has indeed committed acts that violate the Genocide Convention.

The arrest warrants to Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant for crimes against humanity by the ICC have not been issued without good reason. Mr Bennett tries to contrast all this with the outdated 37-year-old Hamas Covenant; he ignores the fact that in 2017 Hamas revised its policies and now accepts a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. In contrast, Israel wants all of Palestine for itself, hence the root cause of the conflict.

Another falsehood is the unevincenced claim of "not a single march, protest or letter to an MP" against the "genocide in Sudan/Darfur" or "jihadist terrorist" killing in Nigeria. The important difference is that the UK is not directly complicit in those genocides. In this one, we clearly are. Not least because of the Balfour Declaration, which is why British people have such a historic duty to speak out on this issue.

On Israel's ethnic cleansing, despite it being well-documented over decades and the many loud and current calls to accelerate the crime from Israeli politicians and extremist groups, Mr Bennett, says all this is "simply untrue". He claims inhabitants in Northern Gaza were just "asked to move", itself a war crime, so the IDF could "eliminate Hamas". He doubles down by saying that "since then, many have returned to the area without hindrance from the IDF". This ignores the extreme difficulties placed on returnees, despite the ceasefire, and that most of them now have very little in the way of homes to return to anyway. Much of Gaza has deliberately been made uninhabitable by Israel in an act of inhumane and unbelievable cruelty.

Perhaps the most insidious part of the letter was this "The real genocide was made by Hamas on 7 October, storming into a kibbutz, murdering, raping and burning 1200". Many deaths undoubtedly did occur that day, including an unknown number inflicted on its own people by the IDF as part of their 'Hannibal Directive'. But much of what was said to have happened has now been thoroughly debunked as 'atrocious propaganda'.

False accusations of mass rape and beheaded babies were used at the beginning of the conflict to try and portray Palestinians as subhuman in order to justify the genocide that Israel was intent on committing. Shamefully, this happened with the collusion of our mainstream media and politicians. Whatever happened on October 7 it was far less brutal than what Israel has subsequently carried out in Gaza. And it cannot be seen, or understood, in isolation from the preceding decades of land theft, racism, injustice and apartheid that have been visited on a beleaguered Palestinian people held captive in their own ancestral land by European settlers ever since 1948. Some things are indefensible, and unforgivable. Israel's ongoing genocide of the Palestinians is one of them.

Yours faithfully,
Philip Colley

✉ **#Letter****UNRELIABLE EVIDENCE**

Dear HIP,

I had to comment on your editorial remark about the *In Defence of Israel* letter: 'editorially we do not accept its contentions and believe many are unsupported by facts. In particular the Israeli Prosecutor's Office have admitted that no allegations of rape or sexual assault have been filed from the 7 October cross-border attack.' You could not have chosen a less reliable form of evidence.

The TV news film of the post-attack landscape, with bodies strewn about, clearly shows women who had been violently sexually assaulted—in a state of undress, with blood in the relevant area, and with a bullet hole to the forehead—which might just account for them not having made an allegation to the Prosecutor's Office.

I'm not sure if post-mortems were carried out on these victims of gang rape and execution facing their masked killer, but if there

were, these will be another source of highly reliable evidence.

A number of the hostages who have been returned to their families have confided in people they trust, that they have been mistreated in various ways, including sexually. There may well be medical reports on these people, which you could have investigated.

I would guess these victims saw no point in retelling (and reliving) their experiences to the Prosecutor when they saw little hope of any of the perpetrators being prosecuted for their criminal actions. The UK annual British Crime Survey asks a proper sample of the population aged 16+ of their experiences of crime and always shows that sexual crimes are heavily under-reported to the police. The gap is even bigger for male victims than for women.

In other words, you have picked on the most unreliable piece of evidence you could possibly find, and ignored far better sources.

The history behind the current turmoil is too long to go into, and people are entitled to hold all sorts of opinions about the actions of both sides, so long as these are based on facts. As a historian, my objection is to the use of 'dodgy' statistics.

Hamas has deliberately brought nothing but misery to the Palestinians but the Hamas-run Ministry of Health's death and injury figures look factually accurate to me, and of course there are unknown numbers of bodies buried in the piles of rubble.

Harriet Lloyd✉ **#From our website****EXTRAORDINARY COMMENTS**

I wish to contest your "editorial" comments on the post *In Defence of Israel*, which I find quite extraordinary and unnecessary.

Your claim that the "Israeli Prosecutor's Office have admitted that no allegations of rape or sexual assault have been filed from the 7 October cross-border attack" are sourced from Jew and Israel hating sources.

What you fail to report is that Moran [Israeli prosecutor Moran Gaz] claimed that the failure to gather evidence could be because the victims are dead or unwilling to approach women's rights organisations. I know HiP is a completely biased Anti-zionist mouthpiece, but I suggest you stick to local politics. I'm fed up with well-heeled



PALESTINIAN NEWS & INFORMATION AGENCY/AP IMAGES

white leftists telling its readers what to think, in what is a highly complex regional war.

Manick Govinda✉ **#From our website****ROTTEN ORANGES**

I work on the premise that if it has a thick skin you don't have to do organic. Your article on oranges, *Rotten or Ripe* in HIP 268, has made me think.

I get organic marmalade as you eat the orange's skin, but not organic oranges otherwise; definitely get organic tomatoes and strawberries, but only organic bananas to save the poor pickers from handling the toxins.

Liz Coleman✉ **#Letter**

Dear HIP

In 'Rotten or Ripe' (HIP no. 268), Susan McFie explores the issue of fruit picked too early and artificially ripened, and touches on the potential health issues associated with applying pesticides. She says that in the UK there is no information about the chemicals used in production of fruit and vegetables, or about potential residues. In fact, there is an organisation based in Brighton called the Pesticide Action Network

(PAN UK—pan-uk.org) which highlights the problems caused by pesticides. The government monitors residue levels of chemicals in food consumed in the UK, and each year PAN analyses the results and publishes the 'Dirty Dozen' list. This is the list of fruits and vegetables most likely to be contaminated with multiple pesticides (known as 'pesticide cocktails') which they consider pose the highest risk to health: there is a growing body of evidence that chemicals become more harmful when combined. Coincidentally, topping the most recent list are soft citrus fruits closely followed by oranges. As Susan McFie says, the best choice is to opt for organic, but because going all-organic is an unaffordable luxury for most people, this list helps you decide which foods are worth paying the extra for.

Jill Kaye✉ **#From our website****COUNCIL SHAKE-UP**

Regarding *End Game for Local Councils* (HIP 268), this is the biggest reform of local government for 50 years and will profoundly affect all our lives, but it has been almost totally ignored by the mainstream media, both nationally and locally. So congratulations on writing such a well-informed report.

Derek Read

We would love to hear from you.

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

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WOH!

womenofhastings@gmail.com

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



Neurographic art by Annie Bryden

Neurodivergent Women: Different Pathways

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism used to be thought rare and were heavily stigmatised. Fortunately, this has changed and organisations such as The Brain Charity (established 1993)

highlight how working environments need to be adapted to support people on the various spectrums of neurodivergence. It is also now accepted that neurodivergent people often have particular innate talents

and skills in areas such as innovation, creativity, problem solving and information recall.

Unfortunately, increased awareness of neurodivergence coexists with a crisis in funding for SEND (Special Education Needs & Disabilities), as well as a huge backlog in diagnosis. This can discourage people from seeking confirmation and validation, especially if they are 'getting by' or have never had an opportunity to voice what's really going on internally.

Why, however, is this a particular problem for women? Firstly, although more women are now being diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) – now sometimes known as autistic spectrum condition, rather than 'disorder' – fewer are diagnosed in childhood than boys, and for those that are, the diagnosis is on average a year later. This puts neurodivergent women at a significant disadvantage both in terms of accessing support, and in terms of the complex journey women follow to express their needs.

Some think that late diagnosis is because women have a natural ability to fit in, finding it easier to mask any 'socially unacceptable' traits. Others question whether it is because girls are more heavily socialised, having the norms and values of society ingrained in our behaviour from a young age. Girls are typically expected to be actively nice, friendly and socially proficient. In fact, in situations like school, many girls on the spectrum experience 'freeze' reactions to cope with the effects of overstimulation.

Added to the complications of diagnosis is the apparent overlap of symptoms of ADHD and autism with Sensory Processing Sensitivity (SPS). American researcher Elaine Aron coined the term SPS in the 1990s to describe traits that characterise how sensitive people adapt to environmental challenges, which may underlie many of the adaptations which we call neurodivergence.

There is still widespread ignorance of SPS, even though 20% of humans of both sexes appear to be affected by it, as well as other higher mammals like dogs, and even giraffes. There is also a lack of consensus on whether SPS is a natural part of neurodiversity i.e. part of the unique nature of people's brains, or part of neurodivergence, describing conditions like ADHD and autism.

Many women who were previously thought of as 'neurotic' or 'shy' might identify with Aron's description of SPS and its four key aspects, for which she uses the acronym DOES. These are: Depth of processing, for example running over past conversations in your head; Overstimulation, where inputs like noise and smells can pile up; Emotions, which are experienced more intensely than by those who don't have SPS; Sensitivity, for instance picking up tiny signals that others miss.

There is, of course, a danger that people will judge and make assumptions when conditions are given labels, their assumptions often being wide of the mark, and based heavily on stereotypes. Nevertheless, members of our collective have worked in different settings teaching children who struggle to thrive – some in specialist classes, and others in the mainstream. The stories we once told about 'difficult' children all unfold in the light of this new understanding about diversity and variations in the level of emotional and physical sensitivity between people.

The good news is that more girls, as well as boys, are now being recognised as having various forms of neurodivergent conditions, and it

seems parents and educators are learning how to better accommodate and deal with behaviours of neurodiverse children.

As the real numbers become apparent, charities as well as institutions are stepping up to help. Locally, The Roebuck Centre, run by Aspens Charities for autistic young people and adults, offers activities like drama, jewellery making, crafts, baking and social evenings, and holds close links "with local colleges and community projects, so that people ... can share their skills with their local community."

For adult women, Women's Voice have recently started a free, drop-in Neurodiversity Peer Support Group for those with any kind of neurodivergence. These take place in the last week of each month: 5.30-7.30 on Thursday evening at The Mini Common Room, 10 Claremont, or Friday morning, 10am-12pm at the Community Hub in the Town Hall.



For in-depth details about the Women's Voice Peer Support Group, please visit facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1030051722488235

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Families and New Parents in East Sussex to Receive Early Years Support

Families and children in Hastings, Rye and the villages will be able to access early years support, such as pregnancy support, parenting classes, and various other schemes and resources, to provide their children with the best possible foundation for their start in life. This is following a £126 million Government funding boost, delivering on Labour's *Plan for Change*, with East Sussex expecting to receive at least £1.7 million through family hubs and the *Start for Life* programme.

Children's early years are crucial

to their development, health and life chances. Antenatal classes, health visitors, parenting support, baby and toddler groups and access to affordable, high-quality early education and childcare – are all extremely vital to guiding parents and supporting child development. However, over 80% of parents have said they struggled to access services that provide them with the help they need.

Part of the *Plan for Change* involves strengthening and joining up family services. This will improve support for parents through preg-

nancy and early childhood, benefiting long term outcomes for children.

Labour MP Helena Dollimore has praised this funding boost and claims that families and children will be gaining crucial extra support. She stated that "The first two years of a child's life lay the building blocks for their whole life," adding that a Labour Government was elected "to give every child the best possible start in life, and that is what we're delivering."

Around £57 million will be made available to 75 local authorities with high levels of deprivation in 2025-26. This budget will be split to supply a variety of services, such as promoting positive early relationships between babies and caregivers, and providing support with breastfeeding.

It comes on top of the £69 million announced in the Budget for a network of family hubs, which act as a one-stop-shop for families to get help with infant feeding advice, parenting classes and perinatal mental health support, among other areas.

Labour County Councillor for Hollington and Wishing Tree, Phil Scott, commented that, "It is now up to Conservative-run East Sussex County Council to make sure that this funding is put to use."



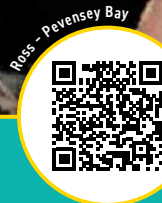
ROD WEBB

HIP published an article *Saying Thank You with an Icy Dip* [Issue 267], reporting on cancer survivor Cathy Cobley's plans to take a dip in the sea to raise funds for Sara Lee Trust. On 19 January, she braved the cold and took the plunge, raising almost £2k for the charity. Dan Redsull, CEO for the Trust said, "We are so proud of Cathy and everything she has achieved. Her bright smile and inspiring energy leave a lasting impact on everyone she meets."

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Sunny Beaches to Cold Seas

ROD WEBB finds out how David Mears became one of Hastings' oldest cold sea swimmers

I met David Mears at his 90th birthday party held at the White Rock Hotel. The party, in honour of their oldest member, was organised by the Hastings & St Leonards Azur Sea Swimmers – a group that meets at groyne 87 on the beach for a daily sea swim, weather permitting.

It was an opportunity to sit down with David and find out about what made him tick, as well as sample his strawberry & cream birthday cake while singing *Happy Birthday*

around the hotel piano.

David was born on the kitchen table of his parents' house in Dane Road on Sunday 13 January 1935 – a true Hastings lad. Fortunately, his father was an obstetrician, so he would have been properly supervised from pregnancy to newborn baby.

In his twenties, David became an early adopter of Spanish holidays, booking a trip to Andalucia in 1960. After that, he realised he: "preferred

the sun of Spain to the cold and damp of England."

He set about training as a nurse and began a decade of living and working in private clinics around Europe, mainly Spain, France and Germany. He returned to Hastings in 1970 to look after his ailing mother while continuing to work as a nurse – ending up opening his own care home as a result of his distrust of those already available.

Some years later, he read an article about the mental and physical benefits of cold swimming, particularly in boosting the immune system and warding off dementia. Convinced by what he read, he started a lifelong habit: "It was certainly a shock when I started," he says, "and it took a month to get in the swing of it!" But he got to enjoy his daily dip and has been going most days for the last 35 years.

He soon joined the Groyne 47 swimmers, and they have become something of a family to him. Moving to the Ridge didn't deter David from driving to the beach every day, and having given up his licence six months ago he now just hops on the bus instead.

His advice for the would-be older swimmer: "Go for it, but I wouldn't advise starting after 75."

David is convinced that swimming has kept him healthy, even warding off the usual coughs and colds. And although a leg problem has stopped him swimming for the past few months, he still comes down to groyne 87 for the company – and hopes to resume swimming soon.

Clearly, for David at least, a cold swim delivered the benefits he read about 25 years ago.

Rosy Future for Warrior Square Gardens

CATHERINE MACK

For anyone who walks regularly in the rose gardens in Warrior Square Gardens, they can't help but smile at the fact that there are a few hardy blooms that refuse to drop their petals, retaining their vibrancy in these dark winter months.

This is, for the most part, thanks to the tender weekly care offered by the local community group of volunteer gardeners who keep the Victorian rose garden alive. Since setting up their Friends of Warrior Square Gardens community group in 2022, they have been on a mission to bring the roses back to their former glory. It's not all their dedication, however. There are, of course, just some blooms that refuse to let

go, and they're often the ones that bring us the most pleasure.

The Friends of Warrior Square Gardens are also a tenacious group, and one of their visions has been to fully restore at least one of the beds to its original triumph of colour and vitality. On Tuesday 21 January, with the recent support of the country's leading breeder and grower of English roses, this vision was fulfilled. Richard Stubbs, from David Austin Roses, broke the soil in two beds to start planting 60 rose plants, 30 of which they have kindly donated.

This is part of a partnership that David Austin Roses has undertaken with other rose gardens of historic significance around the country. As part of that partnership, they donate beauties like *Morning Mist*, *Scarborough Fair*, *Ballerina* and *Desdemona*,



Mary and Jill, two volunteers at the rose gardens. Jill discusses how to plant the roses with Richard Stubbs from David Austin

all roses connected with English cultural heritage. They also visit once a year for a consultation and offer all-year-round support and advice, ensuring the longevity and health of the roses, something essential during the winter months.

It will be interesting to see this time next year, if it's the newly donated, and aptly named *Ancient Mariner* rose that will still be blooming in the heart of winter, given its proximity to the town's maritime influences.

For more details on joining or volunteering with Friends of Warrior Square, join their Facebook Group, follow them on Instagram or turn up on Sundays, between 8am and midday, ready to smell the roses.

321

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New Homes Plus Protection for the Environment?

Can HBC's New Local Plan protect the environment and provide homes for the homeless? DEE WILLIAMS, citizen journalist, investigates

Hastings Borough Council's New Local Plan tries to find a way to achieve growth for the economy with increased retail and local industry, whilst providing a growing population with suitable housing and at the same time protecting urban green spaces and the surrounding areas of natural beauty which bound the zone on all sides. All to be achieved on a tight budget and with an eye to climate change emissions.

Objective 1 contains a number of aspirational statements which are difficult to achieve. The most contentious of which is likely to be 'ensuring new development only occurs where there is adequate capacity in existing services, facilities and infrastructure or where this capacity can be reasonably provided.'

Added to the mix is the fact that HBC has a legal duty to co-operate with Rother District Council and East Sussex County Council who also face significant demands with limited resources. And that's before the recent news of a complete reorganisation of local councils. The government requires HBC to apply 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' rules as contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Failure to do so allows developers to overturn decisions by appealing to the Planning Inspectorate and such action can be costly to defend.

The current plan was set to deliver at least 3,400 net new dwellings between 2011-2028.

Keeping all the plates spinning is not an easy task and in their de-

velopment strategy they identify the following problems.

"...comparatively low house prices; declining affordability for local people, a bias to smaller dwellings; imbalanced in-migration; a large private rented sector and high levels of deprivation." (4.9)

The comparatively low house prices encourage movement into the area from more expensive zones such as Brighton and London. The large private rented sector includes properties for holiday lets which brings income from tourists into the area. Meanwhile high levels of deprivation include the increasing number of families who find themselves homeless due to rising rents and landlords deciding to sell up due to changes to the rules.

In 2023, Cllr Barnett said in an article in the Argus: "It has gone from 170 people needing temporary accommodation two years ago. Now there are over 1,000 people here. It is a shock. And in a town of 90,000, that's a massive percentage."

In an i Opinion piece written by Vicky Spratt in November 2024, Hastings is described as the 'hidden homelessness capital of the UK'. "So many families have either been evicted or unable to find a home they can afford to rent that one in 28 children in Hastings is now homeless and in emergency temporary accommodation – usually bed and breakfast, hostels, hotels or shared accommodation."

A lack of social housing results in long waiting lists for a property. According to HBC social housing information, the total number of

households waiting for a property on 31 December 2023 was 1,547. The total number of properties let through Sussex Homemove from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023 was 189. There is a wait of up to eight years for a two-bed house.

Hastings is undoubtedly suffering a housing crisis. So what is to be done?

According to government statistics, Rother Council completed just 153 homes in 2023/24. At that rate it would take 22 years to complete 3,400. A key problem is a lack of brownfield sites, which are the only areas you can build on if you wish to preserve the natural habitat.

Unfortunately, brownfield sites are few and far between and include areas that are unsuitable for development, such as the former West St Leonard's Primary School site on the Bexhill Road. This site spends much of the year sodden with water, and rumour has it that anthrax sheep are buried there.

If you can't expand outwards due to restrictions from areas of natural beauty and you can't build high without damaging the historic nature of the town, then you are forced to look for patches of land within the already developed area for new build properties, putting a strain on local amenities. Trying to please the environmentalists, the existing residents and the homeless is a tough task, if not mission impossible.

Campaigners continually draw attention to using empty properties as a solution to the problem. This option was considered in the 2014 local plan. "Empty homes are a wasted asset, and a good deal of progress has been made by the Council in tackling empty homes in recent years. However, whilst bringing empty homes back into use does not increase the overall housing stock, it does increase the efficient use of the existing stock. In 2010 there were estimated to be approximately 400 long term empty homes in the town. By long term, we mean homes that have been empty for two or more years." (4.20)

HBC do not have the funds to use compulsory purchase orders to bring empty properties back into use so are reliant upon private developers or new owners to take up the challenge. Their retrospective council tax charges do not encourage new buyers to take these projects on.

"If, when you purchased or leased your property, it had already been empty and unfurnished for two years or more, you will have to pay a 200% council tax charge, or if empty and unfurnished for five years or more you will have to pay 300%." However, they add that, "the additional charge can only be removed by bringing your property back into use." This would not apply to properties that require structural repairs. "No reduction is given on uninhabitable properties requiring or undergoing structural repairs."

Restoration projects are complex

and incur VAT charges not placed upon new builds. Are developers simply waiting for the properties to be beyond repair before making a move?

If the failure of OWENS is anything to go by, then more retail and office space is likely to become available. Could these be repurposed as housing or will they just be left to fall apart?

Having pretty much failed to deliver on the previous local plan, HBC is on more comfortable ground as they draw up plans for the new one. Local councils are very good at running consultations, filing reports, debating decisions and creating lengthy documents full of aspirational intentions. And taking their time about it. Will it deliver any better than the last?

For more, see *New local plan | Planning Policy | Hastings Borough Council*

Local group Standing up for Nature (Hastings and Rother) are holding a series of debates on how to protect the environment whilst tackling the housing crisis. They wish to provide a community voice to be included in the new HBC local plan. If you would like to get involved, then sign up here for information on forthcoming events.

"The government wants Councils to build new housing but our valued green spaces are under threat. Are there other ways to provide more homes? Join us to formulate creative suggestions to respond to council policies on building development and land use for the next 20 years. We'll be discussing new builds, refurbishment, and use of empty homes, as well as key green spaces and wildlife corridors that need protection. This is your chance to tell the Council what you think and to give them ideas, solutions and to let them know you care!"

Search 'Standing up for Nature Hastings and Rother' on Facebook.

The HBC current local plan was adopted in 2014 and was due to complete in 2028. It contains seven main objectives.

- Achieve and sustain a thriving economy
- Ensure everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent home, which they can afford, in a community in which they want to live
- Safeguard and improve the town's environment
- Addressing the impacts of climate change
- Supporting sustainable communities
- Provision of an efficient and effective transport system
- Making best use of the Seafront and promoting tourism

Miss Julie then and Now



Ross Drury as John and Rachel Kennedy as Christine: rehearsals

PATRICK KEALEY

As a seasoned actor and director, I often reflect on why I've chosen the projects I have. I often think that the plays one arrives at for unconscious reasons can turn out to be the most interesting and personally rewarding. I once directed a production of Lorca's classic *Yerma*. Half way through rehearsals I realised that *Yerma*'s grief that she would never have a child mirrored in some way my own dawning awareness that, as a gay man in my mid-thirties, I was never destined to become a fa-

ther. But I hadn't been remotely aware, when I began working on that play, that I had anything in common with Lorca's portrait of stifling Andalusian village peasant life.

I chose to suggest Patrick Marber's *After Miss Julie* to the Stables Theatre for a whole mixture of reasons. First, it's a brilliant script, an update of Strindberg's extraordinary 1888 classic that was so scandalous it was banned worldwide. Next, Marber has cleverly chosen to set his version on the famous election night of July 1945 when Labour won a landslide victory. While riotous drunken celebrations go on outside, a class war is fought

in the bedroom inside and so British class politics becomes an essential theme. Plus, in the wake of another Labour landslide victory 80 years later, this seemed as good a time as any to reflect on the journey we've taken since then: from post-war optimism and hope, to the state of the nation now.

After Miss Julie is about the search for intimacy, the sometimes fatally destructive power of desire and a visceral sado-masochistic love/hate relationship with the body, in particular thwarted female pleasure. This is all set alongside the limitations of class mobility, and a theme of servitude. It boasts three fantastic roles, for actors to play out a dangerous destructive game somewhere between a ménage à trois and a dance of death. For it to work it requires actors to be fearless, vulnerable and raw. As in the best plays, all of its major themes—sex, class, power and money—are absolutely relevant today.

Bring a friend, or a date, along with you. Like it or loathe it, I guarantee you'll have plenty to talk about in the bar afterwards.



Patrick Kealey is artistic director of Theatre Nation, theatrenation.org. *After Miss Julie* plays at The Stables Theatre from Friday 7 to Saturday 15 February. Booking: stables-theatre.co.uk/after-miss-julie Or ring Stables Box Office daily 10.30am -1.00pm on 01424 423221

Others' Stories—Peacemaking & Reconciliation

CAZIMI

A simple two-seater sofa sits quietly waiting at The Beacon on West Hill – the blankets on it are ready to catch words in their knit, its fabric prepared to bounce the sounds of laughter, the cushioning primed for the ebbs and flows of human emotions. The atmosphere hums with anticipation, a subtle sense that something special is about to unfold. On 21 February, this room will fill with people – some nervous, some excited, all curious. Strangers at first, they'll come together, drawn by the simple invitation to step into *storytelling with a twist*.

Upon the tables in the room are scattered objects: varied, inviting and full of potential. At the heart of

the evening lies a simple idea: stories connect us. No scripts, no rehearsals, no expectations. Just a room, a group of people, and the openness to listen to, and share, memories from our own lives. The ingredients for this night are deceptively simple, yet the perfect ground for magic to be made. "I was curious about the format, and it was awesome," said one previous attendee. "It brought a sense of profound connection to our humanness, like a methodology for peace-making and reconciliation."

The night is an interactive experience where the everyday can transform, through the power of storytelling and deep listening. Come with curiosity; leave feeling nourished and with new-found connections.

Behind it all are four remarkable hosts, each bringing their own

flame to the fire. Hastings' Bev Lee Harling is a singer-songwriter whose one-woman show, *Ploughing the Salt Sea*, has captivated audiences. Belfast-born Kelly Thompson is a linguist, storyteller and editor who worked in publishing for 25 years, and now helps authors give birth to their non-fiction book ideas in her role as a book doula. Cazimi and Noé are the artist duo, Mastolf and Mastej, who are behind *The Others' Market*. We four have come together and created *Others' Stories* through a longing to find nights out that give space for real connection.

These evenings aren't about being polished, perfect or even prepared. They're about showing up as you are – open to the possibility of something unexpected and deeply human happening. So, will you dive into the unknown pools of possibility? The sofa is waiting. Bring yourself along to the first *Others' Stories* event of the year, on the evening of Friday 21 February. You will be warmly welcomed...



For tickets and more info visit Eventbrite at eventbrite.co.uk/others-stories-tickets-1131002883069



Demi Moore as Elisabeth Sparkle

A Film of Substance

EBM HUMPHREYS

If you don't like gory horror movies you won't enjoy this film – unless you're anything like me. I'm not normally drawn to the genre, but I knew I had to see this film, which I hoped might be the closing statement in a trial against a youth-and-beauty culture which torments so many women – some to death. Those in the public eye, whose looks have been conflated with their talent, are caught in a trap: fake yourself or be discarded.

From the off, the premise promises cathartic, car-crash satisfaction. Elisabeth Sparkle, a gorgeous but 'ageing' superstar, is offered a miracle drug to make her young again ... but only for seven days at a time. She must be 'herself' for equal amounts of time. A masterwork in body-horror equal to the mighty Cronenberg, *The Substance* offers both sheer bloody brilliance and a deep-dive into a tormented psyche, taking a tight grip on your senses.

I can't say I enjoyed watching this woman brought to her knees and lower by an irresistibly cruel miracle. But here is an enthralling, sci-fi-driven excursion into *the nature of the self* to rival any sober analyst – oh joy! French director Coralie Fargeat is out to achieve something more significant than mere shock.

Augmented by hyper-real close-ups, audacious set design and visceral self-punishment, she makes terrifying the mundane, routine sense of inadequacy pushed on to women by the omnipresence of the impossible pin-up prototype.

And when I *couldn't bear to look?* That was the scene *without any effects at all*, just Demi Moore, acting. A bizarre and eye-opening achievement, worthy of all nominations. Dennis Quaid pops in as Lizzie's perfectly-vile boss too. What men will make of it all, I'm unsure.

Fargeat's pleasure at ripping into the stale American iconography of sex appeal is evident here. But what strikes me as the film's best feature is the surprisingly elegant presentation – notwithstanding the bodily mess. Yes it's hyper-real, dayglo, completely over-the-top and zoomed-in. *It's pure comic book is what it is*. Every single shot is a perfect page. I'm now waiting to see this become the first(?) feature film to be reverse-engineered into a comic book. It would be easier to handle the bodys shock-imagery so essential to the story, and it would last forever – standing as a testament to a time when women went a whole lot further for beauty than a whalebone corset.

Showing at Electric Palace, 39a High Street, Thursday 30, 11am & 7.30pm and Friday 31 January, 7.30pm electricpalacecinema.com

Gail Borrow as Puppeteer in *Panelka* in 2022

VICTORIA KINGHAM

Domestic Theatre as Future Hope

At the present time, the 'value' of education appears generally to be measured in literal financial terms: it ceases to be about learning to think, argue, or evaluate. Generally it seems to be about 'enterprise' and 'information' and 'employability', which is supposed to be equipping children for today's world, as though ideas and imagination and musical and artistic expression were flummery—sideline activities to be taken up, if they are lucky, by those privileged not to have to earn their living.

It's a sad state of affairs but it was, I suppose, ever thus. Free education was not introduced for altruistic reasons, or for any notion that the working class were equal to the moneyed class in intellect or ambi-

tion. One of its first aims was religious education. In 1831 Sunday Schools, often seen as the forerunner to the current English school system, were ministering the Opium of the People to 1,250,000 children each week. Gradually, free education (up to the age of 11) became compulsory and secularised. In 1937, historian Lowndes wrote: "The contribution which a sound and universal system of public education can make to the sobriety, orderliness and stability of a population is perhaps the most patent of its benefits." From that statement it's easy to infer that as far as the

authorities were concerned, available free education was about helping to keep down insurrectionists. Lowndes' 'population' clearly refers to those controlled rather than the controllers. He goes on to talk of 'a commensurate increase in the national wealth and prosperity'—but this was the voice of an already wealthy and well-educated minority, essentially the keepers of the 'national wealth'.

Cut again to the present day, and to the present day keepers. Some are wide boys whose companies are rumoured to have caused and sanctioned murders; some are Russian

oligarchs whose wealth (oil and aluminium) was plundered from the Russian people at the fall of the Soviet Union. Of course, all these people's companies have charitable outlets of which some are educational. Most will be set up as legitimate tax-diversionary measures. But however many millions of pounds are channelled into them, the wealth of the rich few is measured in billions—thousands of millions. So to give up 50 million quid to found an Oxford College is to invest just one 5000th of a total wealth package, a proportion that would be otherwise payable in tax.

These are the controllers of industry, and free education in the UK supplies the majority of their (lower-level) employees—tech workers for their internet companies, chemists and biologists for their pharmaceutical companies, engineers for their oil companies, architects and surveyors for their property companies.

This is obviously a reductive analysis, and any economist or indeed any education specialist will tell you how complex the whole picture is. Nevertheless, where is Art in all this? If it's in Art investments, then it's probably in the interests of the controllers to keep artist numbers down and thus maintain the rarity value of their assets. Music? Well, the Warner empire figures largely, but where does that leave the less conventional, experimental, progressive music output? Philosophy, psychology, linguistics? Who has time for these things? Literature, History, Culture—same applies. And many schools in Britain are now controlled by industrial magnates rather than educators, and children as young as seven are encouraged by banks (eager for their lifelong custom) to learn how to make profits.

Thus the need for charities, or organisations that depend on donations, to fill the gaps has become more and more urgent and conversely, less and less available. And this is where original projects like Explore The Arch fit in, to offer a small beacon of hope in a chaotic sea of inadequate provision. In the last issue of this newspaper I reviewed an extraordinary performance at Archer Lodge that linked two real, utterly different worlds through the topic of domestic activities and concerns via the medium of the internet.

Gail Borrow, prime mover and director of this unique project, explained more about it. She and her associates now part-own the lovely Archer Lodge. "In developing and outputting our originated genre, *Theatre of Domestic Life*, ExploreTheArch responds to and highlights the architectural space," she tells me. "I originated the genre to explore a different approach to the excesses of theatre that I trained in—costly sets designed with little environmental consideration."

Each production is unique. There was for example considerable emphasis, in the last production, on writing and poetry. Their performances and projects are co-operative ventures, so this poetic emphasis came directly from the participants, who had "discussed how their need to conform, as children, diminished their capacity to acknowledge and value their dual heritage. It's a conversation they frequently have with the younger participants of our music sessions," Borrow continues. "ExploreTheArch's work typically involves pared-back scripts and repetition of words, reflecting the domestic experience of language. The home is a place to mull over things that have been said and heard in daily experience in the wider world."

Various aspects of this collective's output are supported by different funding organisations. The 'early career' team are those at the outset of their career who would otherwise be unable to overcome barriers in forging a freelance career in these employment sectors. For many of this team, a bedroom is their workspace. So, at least in the last production, "a bed becomes the site of conversations around the world, of dreams and ambitions."

"Being able to mount an experiential theatre format and a new genre is a great honour" continues Gail Borrow. But clearly the numbers for this kind of audience (and they at least need to be able to manage stairs) are limited, so there's a constant need to raise money. "We mount our productions alongside other funded community and international installation projects, so that our teams can balance their portfolio of creative work." It's a tough call, and funds are being raised in the context of a nation-wide arts funding crisis.

But given that these kinds of creative opportunities are now much less likely to be part of your child's school curriculum, projects like ExploreTheArch offer limited, but tangible, hope. Hope that technology can stimulate rather than stifle the imagination; that original ideas are not reduced to Brave New World-type conformist mediocrity; that artificial intelligence does not replace creative thinking; that opinion is not subsumed by cliché; that there are, and will always be, actors, writers, musicians, painters, thinkers, stories.

explorethearch.co.uk



BOOKBUSTER REVIEW

Shaping for Mediocrity

By Gibson Burrell, Ronald Hartz, David Harvie, Geoff Lightfoot, Simon Lilley 'and friends'
Published by Zer0 Books, 2024, rrp £7.99
REVIEW BY TIM BARTON

Over the last few decades, a growing 'management culture', hog-tied to neoliberalism and austerity programmes, has put education at all levels under assault. This is true from infant, junior, and secondary 'academies', through colleges of Further Education such as our local college (always at the bottom of the pile, it seems, especially adult provision), to universities. Much of this is money-driven, overseen by parachuted-in senior management whose job is less about education, students, pastoral support etc than about purse-strings.

A side effect of management culture under austerity has been staff cuts and pressure on faculties to appear to be competitive as compared to the so-called 'top' universities, such as Oxford and Cambridge, or the Russell Group universities. This attempt to create 'one-size-fits-all' identikit and modular provision, with as little costly face-to-face student contact as possible, argue the authors of this book, may aim at 'shaping for excellence', but in fact shapes for mediocrity. Faculties that offer unique and interesting takes on a subject are deemed problematic when trying to look like a Russell Group top uni, so the very things core to good academic study are militated against.

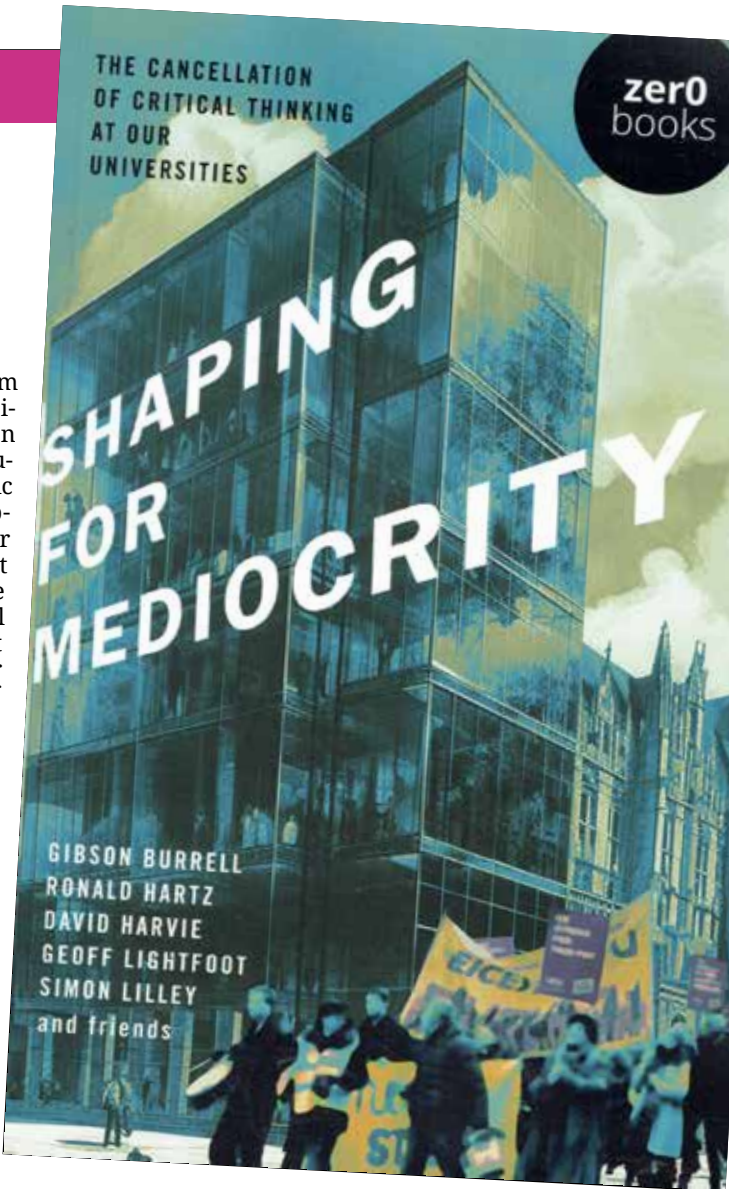
A BLUEPRINT FOR SAVING OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM
The authors here were from Leicester University, and are victims of redundancy rounds, after a long battle to keep a unique syllabus from being watered down. Interest-

ingly, they are from the School of Business, which had an international reputation for academic excellence. It is apparent from their experience that they were a more objective school than I thought could exist under the umbrella of 'business management', which may well have been relevant to their being targeted. They were part of a very militant union and took the fight against redundancies as far as they could, and that sorry tale is well told too. In fact, it is compulsory reading for anyone in a union, or who thinks things are well in worker-manager relations.

Most faculties targeted tend to be those regarded by the anti-liberal-arts Tory attack as 'useless' subjects, as well as 'experts' in general it seems. The experience of the school of business at Leicester is central to the book, but other faculties, such as Mediaeval Studies were targeted, and in other universities it has usually been 'the arts' that were and are targeted. Another example, driven by the science sections at Lancaster University, was the corporate attack on post-graduate studies in environmental philosophy. Lancaster had huge money pumped in by companies such as DuPont, and Monsanto and there was massive pressure, ultimately successful, to shut down sociology

and philosophy that questioned their practices, in for example genetically modified crops, or their corporate capitalist ethos in general.

Addressing these issues is a huge task, and needs to be enacted by powerful forces. Most of those in a position to act are in fact and of course the perpetrators. Politically, the henchmen for neoliberal corporatism have been in government since at least 1979. Melissa Benn, daughter of Tony Benn, wrote a book I reviewed here, *Life Lessons*, which gave a blueprint for saving our education system. It to some degree was taken up in Labour's manifesto in the two elections during Corbyn's tenure as leader. The much complained about change to make private schools pay VAT on certain



services, as other industries must, by denying, in effect, charitable status to them is a light-touch attack on them, Benn, and I, would simply abolish them. But the narrative is controlled by the posh middle-classes who run the newspapers, TV and radio, and have time to bang on about it all on social media. Polls show there is considerable support for the government's policy, but the war on social democracy rages on, as seen more successfully in the assault of the policies on inheritance tax.

SPECTATORS OF OUR OWN CULTURAL SUICIDE
In 2016 on Sky News, Michael Gove expressed a very negative view of 'experts', claiming to be talking for 'the British people', the interviewer, Faisal Islam neatly summing Gove up as an 'Oxbridge Trump'. The philistinism of his gov-

ernment was remarkable, and drove much of the attack on the academe. One chapter is especially illuminating and topical in relation to the role played by social media during their anti-redundancy campaigns and strike action. It is clear that power can buy time, so a highly professional and unrelenting assault on those fighting redundancies and glossy pro-uni PR campaign was difficult to counter by those strapped for time with teaching, inspections, marking etc to do. Misinformation and lies repeated over and over is a huge issue on social media, and the mainstream media today: both owned by a small clique of overwhelmingly powerful billionaires.

Adam Steiner, in his book *Silhouettes and Shadows* sums things up tidily, although talking of TV not social media and the tabloids – 'it doesn't teach you anything, it simply accumulates images and sound bites to become the junk food of the mind. In watching, we enter into a contract, the more we see the more readily we accept to be nullified and battered in the contemporary backwash of culture. Our refusal to turn away commits us to the routine of the everyday atrocity, spectators of our own cultural suicide'. So long as your 'breakfast news' consists of GB News, the Daily Mail, and Trump and Elon Musk's toxic tweets, we remain doomed to, at best, 'mediocrity', if not something far darker. But definitely not 'success'.

Shaping For Mediocrity is available from Bookbuster, 39 Queens Road TN34 1RE

POETRY CORNER

MORNING IN MAGDALENMA
JUDE MONTAGUE

I went into the church, not to pray but to see.
The Icons hung themselves over wood paneling,
didn't look at me. They were already a bit out of joint.
Not uneasy, but they weren't talking
to the previous occupants who were as solid
as ghosts. Let me show you their concerns.

There's a window, with the light coming through
the stained red and green. In the glass, a blonde
is screaming to be rescued. She's tied to a tree,
and a knight on a horse, with a lance to pierce
a red dragon is eternally about to deliver the fatal blow
Ignoring this Netflixy drama, the iconic saint's hands
bless all in holy stillness. His nose is so thin, it could be folded paper,
flat against a golden 2D sky. Peace be with you.

My guide is the clever and hospitable Trevor,
from the Hastings Friendship Group.
'They can't officially say prayers for my late wife
as she wasn't baptised into the orthodox faith,
but they might sneak her in somehow,' he said,
scanning down the queue of the departed,
ready to be remembered in the appropriate ceremony.

Is it okay to laugh a little at the sign that says,
'Do not, ladies, wear lipstick, when kissing the icons
in case of damage.' The divine lives on in clouds, tears
and the wild wonder of holding my breath,
it returns, through changes that keep happening here on earth.

CROSSWORD CORNER

- Across**
- 1. Film franchise is a wonder (6)
 - 3. Some bit of feeling may prove sticky (6)
 - 4. Early or late ones found on the stairs (6)
- Down**
- 1. Unknown man sprays plants (6)
 - 2. A spell to turn your coat flaps (6)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 5 of The HIP List

1					2
3					
4					

Make Time to Do The Roo

CHRIS CONNELLEY gets excited at the Prince Albert's bar menu

We didn't have a television in my house when I was growing up in the 1970s, so I spent a lot of time with my grandparents, who did. My gran loved soaps, and Coronation Street featured heavily in my early years' viewing diet.

I was reared on images of a strong, if often fractious, Weatherfield community, where people lived their lives on a street blessed with a corner shop and a pub, the Rovers Return, a traditional backstreet boozer that that was used by everyone, irrespective of age, background, ethnicity or class, to share gossip, while away dull days, and to mark major moments of joy and sadness. It even served food, a rarity at the time, with Betty Turpin's hotspot providing a proper plateful in an era when bar food often meant a pickled egg and pork scratchings.

These days, it is pubs that don't do food that are the rarity, and

pitching the menu just right is an art form.

Over the last few years, the Prince Albert on Cornwallis Street—arguably the cosiest of local bars—has tried various food formats, and for me, its latest take on a modern pub menu, with a stellar Sunday roast line-up, is the best yet. It's been put together by Roo Walton, formerly of the much loved Marina Fountain, who now holds court in the pub's basement kitchen from Thursday through Sunday.

I first tried his food during Oktoberfest, when he cooked up an A grade veal schnitzel (surely due for a return) and I've been in a few times since, most recently with a tasting crew large enough to test pretty much the whole menu in one setting. Or 'doing the Roo' as we call it.

The cauliflower bhaji with coconut and mint raita opened the bat-



ting and presented well. The crisp batter, pitch perfect seasoning and generous portion size attracted strong praise and provided a big and boisterous start to the meal.

The curried squash soup, with coriander, ginger and coconut milk

came with an equally gutsy personality, earning broad beams from our hungry tasters on a damp, cold night.

The creamy, delicately spiced chickpea dahl, up next, packed a more subtle punch, but was no less seductive, with its accompanying

crunchy asian slaw generating a thumbs up in its own right.

The meat eaters around the table were similarly impressed. The Southern fried chicken burger in a brioche bun with chipotle mayo and pickles, served with a side of fries, was judged incredibly tasty and top trump, and the chuck brisket patty and Monterey jack cheese burger was nicely seasoned and juicy but not lubricious. My deep fried pork belly croquettes maintained the high standard, mainlining pure comfort food joy.

We rounded off the feast with two fishy plates, a smooth almost mousse-like smoked mackerel pate and piping hot cod goujons with aioli, palate cleansing bites that left us purring with pleasure.

We washed the meal down with a couple of bottles of very obliging rioja.

With its roaring fire, warm welcome, friendly service and fair pricing, The Prince Albert proved to be the perfect host, and was deservedly busy early on a rainy Thursday evening. It feels like a proper local, and we'll be back.

The Prince Albert is at 28 Cornwallis Street, Hastings TN34 1SS. It is open daily from 4pm (Monday through Thursday) and from noon on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Its kitchen is open from Thursday through Sunday.



Choose Local with Noah's Goat

JORDAN CONNELLEY pops down to the Old Town to visit Noah's Goat, the newly opened wine bar and shop on George Street

Run by dynamic and friendly couple Nick and Nicky, formerly patrons of the beloved Stag Inn, the Noah's Goat team have a real passion for wine. Their emphasis is on bringing higher quality wines to the community at prices not dissimilar to the supermarket, whilst also stocking an incredible list of curated wines that will keep the pickiest of wine connoisseurs on cloud nine.

Open Thursday to Sunday, Noah's Goat is a welcoming wine shop during the day, where you can chat with Nick and Nicky and get advice on their well stocked cellar. In the evening, it transforms itself into a cool and cosy wine bar that hosts funky music events, quizzes, wine tastings and even private events on request. The team are passionate about delivering a comfortable wine bar experience and are experimenting with a menu featuring

high quality cheese and charcuterie, as well as a hot dish of the day.

For their wine choice, Nick suggests one of their most popular bottles of Southern Italian red, the vibrant and punchy Archivio Aglianico IGT, priced affordably at £14.

This complex and fruity wine, with notes of fresh vibrant berries and hints of spice, is the perfect medium-style wine for a midweek glass or a light weekend dinner. Hailing from Benevento in Calabria, and made from 100% Aglianico grapes, Archivio is a perfectly balanced and surprisingly nuanced wine from one of the lesser appreciated regions of Italian wine making.

Aglianico, despite being widely considered one of the top three native grape varieties of Italy and often referred to as the 'barolo of the south' is sadly one of the lesser known grapes, lost in a focus on higher

priced Northern Italian wines.

Archivio is a great example of what can be achieved with this lesser-known Calabrian gem,

demonstrating what a good Southern Italian wine can offer when handled well with love and care.

Nick suggests Archivio would be perfectly paired with a simple vegetable pasta dish and suggests roasting some aubergines and courgettes with a rich and warm tomato sauce for the perfect vegetarian accompaniment. Alternatively, for a more carnivorous audience, I'd recommend a no-nonsense Neapolitan pasta classic, spaghetti alla puttanesca, a rich and fiery dish packed with capers, anchovies and chili, as the perfect pairing.

So, during these cold, wet weeks, as we all wait for winter to finally wind down, why not pop down to Noah's Goat to pick up a cheeky midweek bottle of wine?

Or better yet, stay a while, and as the team like to say 'Get your goat on' with a selection from their finely curated by-the-glass menu, or for only £10 corkage pop open a bottle of their more extensive shelf selection. Pair that with a light bite—charcuterie board, pâtés or a selection of cheeses. With what Noah's Goat has to offer, going local has never been easier or more tempting!

Noah's Goat is located at 68 George Street and is open Thursday through Sunday. For more information visit @noahs_goat_hastings on instagram.

FOOTBALL

Pointless January Confirms Relegation Threat

19 January:
Hastings Utd 1,
Cray Wanderers 2

22 January:
Hastings Utd 1,
Binfield 2

26 January:
Chatham Town v Hastings Utd
– match abandoned

28 January:
Carshalton Athletic 2,
Hastings Utd 1

HUGH SULLIVAN

Some things are more important than football. The match between Chatham Town and Hastings United at the home side's Bauvill Stadium last Saturday was abandoned after half an hour when a 'U's travelling supporter sitting in the stand collapsed, needed immediate life support, and was eventually helicoptered off to a London hospital. There was no resumption of play: the fixture will be replayed at a future date.

The month of January won't be recalled with fondness by any Hastings supporter. A 3-1 defeat by Folkestone Invicta on New Years Day was followed by two and a half weeks of inaction as a result of adverse weather, then by two home defeats, and another reverse at Carshalton on Monday night. There's no doubt that they face an uphill battle to avoid relegation from the Isthmian Premier League at the season's end. They were promoted to this league in 2022, and finished in its upper reaches, just short of qualification for further promotion play-offs, in the two full seasons

since. However, they now sit 20th in the current table with only Bowers & Pitsea and Bognor Regis Town below them, and a five point gap between them and 18th place which would secure their Premier status.

On 19 January they hosted Cray Wanderers. The visitors had started the season in poor league form – without a win in ten matches between August and October – but have been upwardly mobile in recent weeks, with six victories in eight matches in December and January coming into this contest. Remarkably, each of the six were by the same scoreline, 1-0.

With both sides amongst the lowest scorers in the league, Hastings manager Danny Searle no doubt drummed into his players the importance of not conceding the first goal. Included in his defensive lineup was Ollie Black, former 'U's favourite who has returned to the Pilot Field on loan from Worthing, and a new 20-year-old left back Alex Kpakpe. There was a notable preference for booting the ball out of defence rather than attempting to build possession play on a heavy and mud-ridden surface. George Walker, who has enjoyed a good season on the ball as full-back or wing-back but has sometimes lacked strength in defence, was pushed forward to a winger's role.

These tactical tweaks did not bear fruit. Cray took immediate control of the midfield, scored in the 12th minute with a crisp shot after 'U's keeper Louis Rofers parried an initial attempt, and redoubled their lead with an angled free-kick from wide on the right that found the far corner of the Hastings net. At the other end Walker found himself clean through one-on-one with the Cray keeper, but lacked a forward's instinct to place a shot past him.



Hastings manager Danny Searle

Shortly before halftime Cray failed to clear a trademark long throw from Black – his range seems to have extended to even greater lengths in his half-season away – and Ben Wells scored for the 'U's at close range to reduce the deficit to 2-1. But that's how it stayed through the second half, with the visitors continuing to make the more incisive moves and coming closer to scoring again than their hosts. Searle brought on both Fin Chapman and Will Harley to assist Davide Rodari in attack, but neither made any significant impact.

VELOCITY CUP LOSS

Three days later Hastings hosted Binfield in a quarterfinal of the Velocity Cup (effectively the Isthmian League Cup). The Berkshire side are placed in the bottom half of the South Central Division of the Isthmian League, a tier below Hastings, and a victory might have boosted morale, but Searle understandably put out a weakened team, omitting Rodari, key midfielders Jack Dixon and Adam Lovatt, and defenders Black and Finn O'Mara. Binfield again took a 2-0 lead in the first half; the 'U's only pulled one goal back in added time at the end of the second through Lovatt, on as a substitute.

Following the abandoned game at Chatham, United travelled again to Carshalton on a night of gusty winds in the wake of Storm Herminia. Two loan additions to the squad – midfielder Ansu Janneh, who has returned temporarily from Billericay after leaving the Pilot Field in the summer, and central defender Teddy Perkins from Welling United – were drafted in to play, with Lovatt unavailable and Dixon again on the bench.

After an even first half in which Walker provided the 'U's' best moments, the home side went ahead on the stroke of halftime through another former Hastings player David Smith. Davide Rodari equalised from a free kick on the edge of

the penalty area, dispatching the ball low into the right hand corner. United looked good for at least a point, if not all three, but conceded a second goal five minutes from time to go down 2-1.

Tomorrow (Saturday) the 'U's

host East Sussex rivals Lewes, who are not in good shape themselves – without a win in ten matches over December and January, having previously been up among the league's front runners. Three points against them would be very precious.



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CRICKET

Umpire Wanted

Hastings & St Leonards Priory Cricket Club are looking for an umpire to officiate in their 2nd XI matches for the 2025 season in Division 4 East of the Sussex League.

Games are on Saturdays starting at 12.30pm from the beginning of May onwards. Home fixtures are at Horntye Park. Expenses will be pro-

vided, and the club can give for support with umpire training courses.

If interested, whether it is for a full season, part only, or just the occasional Saturday, please contact John Morgan on 07811 443910 or by email to johnboymorgan@hotmail.com.

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