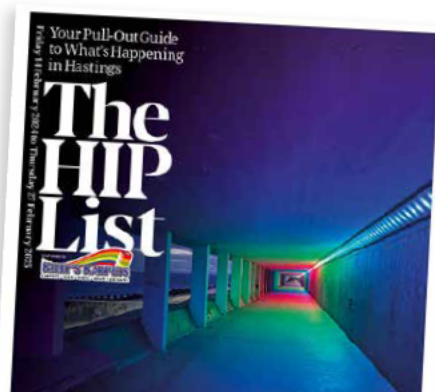


Hastings Independent

270 14 February 2025 THE FREE & INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR HASTINGS

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



Water Compensation Victory

PAUL McLAUGHLIN

Southern Water has agreed to pay £2.8 million in compensation to its customers in Hastings who were left without water for several days last May. The incident, which left 30,000 homes across the town without water, was caused by a broken water pipe connecting the Darwell

Reservoir with the town.

The burst pipe and subsequent water outage occurred on the busiest weekend of the year for tourism in the town. It decimated business for local hotels and shops hoping to capitalise on the traditional *Jack-in-the-Green* festival and the *Mayday Run*, the annual motorcycle rally, which together draw thousands of visitors into the town.

The privatised water company

admitted that they had been aware of the need to replace the water pipe for many years. In 2007, Southern Water submitted a planning application to replace a 12km section of the pipe between the Darwell Reservoir and the Beauport Water Supply Works but never started the work.

When the pipe burst on 2 May 2024, tens of thousands of homes were left without water with many of them only regaining their supply

five days later. During the outage, Southern Water was forced to set up bottled water stations around town. There was gridlock across much of Hastings and St Leonards as residents queued in cars to get emergency water supplies.

Southern Water refused to pay compensation at the time. They argued that the nature of the burst, coupled with the provision of alternative sources of water meant that

the incident did not qualify for any compensation payments under regulations and guidance set by the regulator, Ofwat. Instead, the company set up a £1 million goodwill fund to provide grants for local businesses, community events, groups, and charities.

The people of Hastings were not to be denied, however. Paul Barnett and Julia Hilton, the former and current Leaders of Hast-



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Peruse the pages of this issue and you'll find pictures of Feargal Sharkey, a flag most would have no idea was that of Hastings Council, a poetic punk, ammonites, cornets and a badger. All told, a pretty good indication of the wide range of content.

In News, electoral deferral and concerns for local democracy loom large, along with misbehaving academics and a Jack in the Green funding boost.

Our busy Community pages consider litter, disabled facilities grants, talking over a cuppa and Strive - a new initiative supporting local businesses.

Along with some wonderfully moody black and white images, the Arts section has a mix of reviews and previews, this time with a strong emphasis on music and featuring virtuosos Jones, (blues guitar), and Sir Stephen Hough (classical piano). Plus, Fat Tuesday Mardi Gras details - not long to go now - and Stories from *Deep Time*, a new exhibition at the Hastings Museum and Art Gallery that's ideal for a family half-term outing.

HIP is starting a new Business page next issue, contact us with details of new openings, changes and developments at business@yourhip.co.uk

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News



Helena Dollimore and Feargal Sharkey

1 ings BC, led a determined campaign to hold Southern Water to account. They were joined in July last year by the new Labour MP, Helena Dollimore, who took up the challenge in Parliament. She grilled the Southern Water CEO, Lawrence Gosden, at the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee and, with Government support, pushed him to agree to review the company's policy on the matter.

Under the terms of the new compensation package, eligible households affected by the outage will receive £50 for every 12 hours they were left without water. As a result, some households will receive up to £250 to recompense them for the incident.

Ms Dollimore welcomed the compensation package saying it was "right and proper that people who were left without water for up to

five days are compensated after what was such a distressing incident for our community."

She has vowed to keep up the pressure on Southern Water to "fix crumbling infrastructure, clean up our sea and guarantee a reliable water supply of which we can all be proud."

Southern Water hopes the compensation package will help rebuild trust with its customers in the town after the impact of what it described as "this awful incident". The company says the pipe that burst has been fixed as part of an £80 million investment plan for the town which, it says, "will deliver performance improvements across the board, including building resilience into the water supply network, reducing storm overflows, and collaborating with other agencies to address flood risk."

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Steve Reed, also welcomed the compensation package and said the Government was "determined to increase the accountability of water executives for when things go wrong." He said the new Water Special Measures Bill, which is making its way through Parliament, includes strong powers to ensure

bosses face personal criminal liability for lawbreaking and will give the water regulator new powers to ban the payment of bonuses if environmental standards are not met. The bill will also require water companies to install real-time monitors at every sewage outlet, with data independently scrutinised by the water regulators.

Inevitably, there is a cost to securing improved standards of water quality. Southern Water household bills, for example, are due to rise by an eye-watering 53% over the next five years. The company says the price rises are "vital" to funding infrastructure improvements and to prevent instances such as that which occurred in Hastings last year.

However, after years of poor performance by Southern Water, convincing customers that the price rises are worth it may prove to be a challenge too far for the beleaguered company.

The Environmental campaigner, Feargal Sharkey, took to Twitter to welcome the "huge victory". He said it was "a timely reminder that you can win when you are prepared to say no and stand up to monopolies," adding, "phenomenally well done to the people of Hastings and tenacious local MP Helena Dollimore."

SITE NOTICE FOR APPLICATION FOR A PREMISES LICENCE

This notice is to advise that on the 5th day of February 2025 an application for the grant of a variation of a Premises Licence was made to Hastings Borough Council for the premises known as **CopperPot Distilleries LTD, 15 Battle crescent, Hastings, TN37 7AW**

Was made by: Dionne Tester
For the following licensable activities or proposed variation

Sale of Alcohol by Retail (off the premises via website) 09:00

to 08:59 Monday to Sunday apply to extend the hours for the off sale of alcohol through a delivery service between the hours of 09:00 and 22:00
Opening Hours 09:00 to 00:00 Monday to Sunday

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

consecutive days from the date of the application shown above.

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

Dated this 5th day of February 2025

HASTINGS TIDES

DATE	HIGH AND LOW TIDES				SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON
FRI 14 FEB	H 0:07am	L 7:10am	H 12:26pm	L 7:22pm	7:11	5:12	
SAT 15 FEB	H 0:38am	L 7:37am	L 12:56pm	L 7:45pm	7:09	5:14	
SUN 16 FEB	H 1:07am	L 7:59am	L 1:23pm	L 8:04pm	7:07	5:16	
MON 17 FEB	H 1:33am	L 8:20am	L 1:47pm	L 8:27pm	7:05	5:18	
TUES 18 FEB	H 1:58am	L 8:46am	L 2:13pm	L 8:55pm	7:03	5:19	
WEDS 19 FEB	H 2:26am	L 9:17am	H 2:42pm	L 9:30pm	7:02	5:21	
THURS 20 FEB	H 2:58am	L 9:55am	H 3:19pm	L 10:14pm	7:00	5:23	THIRD
FRI 21 FEB	H 3:41am	L 10:48am	H 4:13pm	L 11:17pm	6:58	5:25	
SAT 22 FEB	H 4:59am	L 11:59am	H 6:10pm		6:56	5:26	
SUN 23 FEB	L 0:37am	H 6:56am	L 1:19pm	H 7:39pm	6:54	5:28	
MON 24 FEB	L 1:58am	H 8:11am	L 2:38pm	H 8:41pm	6:52	5:30	
TUES 25 FEB	L 3:14am	H 9:06am	L 3:48pm	H 9:29pm	6:49	5:32	
WEDS 26 FEB	L 4:18am	H 9:51am	L 4:45pm	H 10:10pm	6:47	5:33	
THURS 27 FEB	L 5:11am	H 11:11am	L 6:18am	H 11:28pm	6:45	5:35	

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



Waggy Walk

Saturday 8th March from 9am
Rye Harbour Nature Reserve
Meet at Rye Harbour Village Hall

A fun 6k sponsored dog walk.
Tickets on sale now, scan the QR code to book or call
01424 456396.



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Council Changes Fast-Tracked

PAUL McLAUGHLIN

The Government has confirmed plans to cancel elections to the East Sussex County Council due in May 2025 and to fast-track Sussex as one of its priority areas for devolution. The controversial proposals will see the abolition of all local councils across Sussex, including Hastings BC. In their place will be a new Mayor of Sussex and three all-purpose unitary authorities.

Ministers have identified the devolution of powers from Whitehall as a key to unlocking regional growth. New locally elected Mayors, including a Sussex-wide Mayor, will be given sweeping new powers over housing, planning, transport, energy, skills and employment support. They will be local champions and coordinate change within their communities.

They will work alongside new unitary councils, which will have simpler and more effective structures designed to cut waste and improve accountability, to ensure taxpayers get value for money from their services.

UNCLEAR TIMEFRAME

The timescale for the abolition of district and borough councils is still unclear. However, the Government has stressed that there will be no immediate changes to the operation of councils across Sussex or the services they currently provide.

Ministers have promised a devolution consultation will be held before the end of March 2025, with the results of the consultation assessed in the spring.

A ministerial decision will then be taken as to whether to proceed with a Mayoral strategic authority in late summer/early autumn. This will be followed with a spending review to confirm future Mayoral investment funds for the new Mayoral areas.

In March 2026 a formal notice of Mayoral elections will be given with the election of the new Mayor set to take place on Thursday, 7 May 2026.

This timeline is incredibly tight and could very easily be blown off course by unexpected events.

The wider reorganisation of local councils has still to be fully determined. Elections to proposed new unitary authorities have been pencilled in for May 2027, with the aim

of replacing all existing county and borough councils the following year.

Like the Mayoral changes, the timeframe leaves very little room for meaningful consultation for such important and wide-ranging democratic changes. Ministers have only just issued a formal invitation to submit reorganisation proposals.

UNCERTAIN BOUNDARIES

It is envisaged that there will be three new unitary councils across Sussex, each with a population of 500,000 or more, and each tasked with working with the Mayor and managing a broader range of council services.

It is widely expected that the boundaries of the new unitary councils will have a similar footprint to those of the existing East Sussex CC, West Sussex CC and Brighton and Hove City Council. This is not certain, however, and in the House of Commons last Tuesday, Helena Doolimore, the MP for Hastings, Rye and the villages, raised the prospect of a Sussex Coastal authority. She called on the Government to "hear the voices of our seaside communities and to make sure that, when we are designing a unitary authority footprint, it is of a size that works for our communities and that allows us to tackle the inequalities that they face."

The response from Angela Rayner, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, gave her some encouragement. She said the Government "recognise that certain areas may have different needs...and we will work with local areas to look at what their needs are and then adapt. This is not set in stone."



Julia Hilton

HASTINGS BC OPPOSITION

The Leader of Hastings BC, Julia Hilton, has made clear her opposition to the reform proposals. She confirmed that a cross-party working group has been set up to "agree a vision both for a new council make up that ensures local residents have a strong voice and to ensure the new Sussex Mayor delivers for the residents of Hastings." This working group will be making recommendations to a special full council meeting on 26 February at 6.00 pm. The meeting will be open to the public and there will be 30 mins for public questions at the beginning.

Cllr Hilton said Hastings BC has "also committed to full engagement with residents on the future shape of a council but timing continues to be absurdly fast as we have been told by the minister that we need initial proposals ready by 21 March. We need to ensure that these new Mayoral Authorities actually empower local communities rather than suck power away and up into larger more distant structures."



OFF GRID SOLAR WORKSHOPS

ENERGISE
SUSSEX COAST



Friday 21 February 18:00 – 20:30
How to build off-grid solar systems

Friday 28 February 18:00 – 20:30
Sizing your off-grid solar system

Central Hall, Station Road, Hastings TN34 1NG
Refreshments provided

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For more information visit: www.energisesussexcoast.co.uk
Contact: kate@energisesussexcoast.co.uk or call: 01424 390 062



Ark Alexandra Academy: William Parker Campus

**COURSES & WORKSHOPS****Mondays**

11am: Intermediate French Course Level 1 with Olivier Jarré
7pm: Intro to Crochet Course with Katie Jones

Tuesday

3pm: Hand Embroidery Afternoon Course with Lady B Embroidery
6pm: Creative Watercolour Evening Course with Alice Stevenson

Wednesday

11am: French for Beginners Level 1 with Olivier Jarré
3pm: Intro to Crochet Afternoon Course with Katie Jones
7pm: Hand Embroidery Course with Lady B Embroidery

Thursday

3pm: Afternoon Knitting Course with Harriet of FLOCK (fortnightly)
7pm: Evening Knitting Course with Harriet of FLOCK (fortnightly)
6pm: Evening Clothes-making Course with Anna Winston (fortnightly)

Weekends

22nd Feb: Macrame Workshop with Tara Macdonald
28th Feb: Tarot Readings Evening with Clarissa Shanahan
1st March: Modern Calligraphy Workshop with Alice Gabb
2nd & 9th March: Tarot for Beginners Course with Clarissa Shanahan
8th & 15th March: School of Smock Course with Lady B Embroidery
14th, 21st, 28th March: Chinese Brush Calligraphy Course with Yan Mak
16th March: Botanical Bundle Dyeing Workshop with Tara Macdonald
23rd March: Hastings Mackerel Embroidery Workshop with Becky Hogg
29th March: Paper Floristry Dahlia Workshop with Laura Reed
5th April: 'Magpies: Poetry Scavenger Hunt' Workshop with Emma Joliffe
6th April: Stencilling for Fabric Workshop with Nicolette Tabram
12th April: Kids Machine Sewing Workshop with Sew Cosy Patterns
26th April: Beginners Machine Sewing Workshop with Sew Cosy Patterns
26th April: Improvers Machine Sewing Workshop with Sew Cosy Patterns

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Why Won't They Behave?

HUGH SULLIVAN

Ark Alexandra Academy, the biggest secondary school in Hastings, is in the firing line as parents, teachers and local MP Helena Dollimore trade accusations and demands over disciplinary measures being imposed on pupils by its principals.

In 2021 Ofsted reported "behaviour and attitudes" at Ark Alexandra Academy Hastings secondary school as "good" but that the "quality of education...required improvement". After the arrival of Executive Principal Rhys Spiers in September 2023 and a further inspection in February 2024, these findings were reversed. Behaviour and attitudes were now marked as needing improvement.

Then, led by Mr Spiers, Ark hit national headlines in September when it introduced an outright ban on the use of mobile phones by its pupils. The ban effectively outlawed the carrying of phones not only within the school premises but on journeys to and from school, since there was no lockbox or other deposit system set up to accommodate them during the school day. Some parents applauded, others were appalled and took to social media to say so.

Other disciplinary changes have followed. There have been wide-

spread reports of a substantial ratchet-up in detentions and suspensions of pupils following petty infringements of school rules and etiquette – failure to raise a hand in class, or taking too long to change after PE – are reported as triggering penalties that many parents regard as disproportionate.

THREATS AND ABUSE

Mr Spiers is unapologetic. He describes the school he arrived at 18 months ago as "blighted by disruptive behaviour". In a forthright open letter issued on 24 January he maintained that teachers were leaving the profession because of threats and abuse from a minority of students and parents. But the new "warm-strict approach" (his words) to discipline, "introduc[ing] rules to ensure our school environment is safe and respectful", had transformed the school in the last year: "students are now set to achieve strong outcomes".

The truth of this may depend on which students he is talking about. There's a suspicion that improved academic results have come, if at all, because less competent pupils are prevented from sitting exams they might fail. And one parent, Katie Ingham, has issued a petition on the Change.org website, calling for an

immediate review of Ark's disciplinary policies and culture both by the school itself and by Ofsted. In it she describes these policies as "extreme and punitive...having a detrimental effect on children's mental health, undermining their ability to enjoy learning and thrive in a supportive environment". So far she has garnered over 260 signatures.

Ms Ingham alleges that often neither children nor their parents are given any adequate or transparent reason for the imposition of detentions, and she feels that vulnerable pupils are given no allowance. She questions whether suspensions are being used to "cleanse" the school of those who are less favoured, putting pressure on their parents to remove them. Her petition had garnered 270 votes by the end of last week.

Former borough councillor Claire Carr has also weighed in on Facebook to challenge Mr Spiers directly: "You make this sound like irrational parents who care more about phones than standards are removing their children...In reality, hundreds of desperate parents have taken their children from Ark Alexandra, often after pressure or at the suggestion of the school (off-rolling), due to a culture of bullying, abuse and a profound lack of transparency, or a lack of support. The rules apply only to the pupils but never to the senior leadership who routinely exclude for reasons outside the government guidance."

She added: "Exclusion appeals are ignored, communication with the school is replied to weeks later at times so as to be deliberately destructive and not find any way forward, and registers are changed after the fact."

HOME-SCHOOLING

On 8 January, Ms Dollimore raised in the House of Commons the fact that up to 800 children in Hastings are being home-schooled – one in 16 children, equivalent to 27 classrooms – and coupled this with a Facebook post referring to over 120 children being removed from Ark last term alone. She suggested to her parliamentary colleagues that measures contained in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill would give these children "all the support they need to get back into mainstream education". However, on Facebook Ms Dollimore referred to "many parents who have told me that they feel they have no choice but to withdraw their children because some local schools are failing to address their children's needs" – particularly those with Special Education Needs (SEND). She singled out Ark Alexandra Academy, where last term 123 pupils (almost 10% of the total number) were excluded.

Mr Spiers remains unmoved. "Needless to say, we are incredibly proud of the work we are doing at Ark," he told HIP, "and I am confident that this will finally improve standards of secondary education in Hastings."

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

✉ Letter

INSIDE UBAT

Dear HIP

As a former primary school leader with over 14 years of experience in Hastings, I am deeply concerned by the decisions currently being made regarding the future of our primary schools. Both the Labour and Conservative parties seem to treat the situation as a poorly executed PR stunt. Had they consulted with primary school leaders, they would know that many within the leadership of UBAT schools do not share their view. The reality is a deeply unsettling atmosphere in schools, where staff—who have dedicated their careers to improving student outcomes—are now facing job insecurity. This is not reflected in the political party celebratory press releases.

The National Education Union (NEU) has faced its own struggles with UBAT, but this latest development undermines all their progress. Previous strike actions now seem to have been for nothing, and future negotiations with new trusts will lead to further disruption. Many staff in Hastings' schools, who have worked tirelessly to improve students' lives, are at risk of redundancy. Yet, political leaders and unions remain silent on these potential consequences, misinforming the public.

A critical issue is the misunderstanding surrounding central charges. While secondary schools in Hastings contribute to a central pot, the suggestion that this money funds a luxurious central team in Brighton is absurd. UBAT does not operate in Brighton; instead, its central staff largely work within schools, supporting local operations. A significant portion of secondary school funding has been redirected to help primary schools under financial strain. UBAT's executive team failed to communicate this clearly, allowing widespread misinformation to contribute to the current crisis.

The real problem now is fragmentation. The Department for Education plans to divide Hastings schools among multiple trusts, potentially from outside the area. These trusts will have little incentive to support one another; for example, a trust taking on a secondary school will have no incentive to help a rival trust with its

primary school. This could lead to school closures or redundancies, further damaging our Hastings schools.

UBAT's original model (carried over from the Hastings Academies Trust), where secondary schools supported primary schools, was effective. However, more attention should have been paid to other trusts in the Hastings area, particularly those that should have been more inclusive, but instead moved more challenging students towards the inclusive UBAT schools.

The lack of accountability from UBAT's trustees is also a major issue. These individuals, who are disconnected from Hastings, have failed in their oversight and are now walking away without facing any consequences.

The best solution for Hastings would be a return to a model like the original Hastings Academies Trust; one trust with leadership that understands and prioritises the community's unique needs. This would prevent the fragmentation of schools and allow dedicated staff to continue their vital work. Simply returning to Local Authority control, as suggested by Labour / NEU, is not the answer. The schools opted to join a single trust because of the poor performance of the LA.

The writer remains in the teaching profession and has asked for anonymity.

✉ Letter

END GAME FOR LOCAL COUNCILS

Dear HIP

I read with interest your piece in HIP 268 End Game for Local Councils in which you reported that the council was to be moved, along with other councils, to a central-

ised 'service'. This is happening in North Yorkshire, where the councils of outlying areas were moved centrally to Harrogate. Undoubtedly the driver for this is money. And I think your reported fears of doing this are correct, in that there will be unfair redistribution of resources. As far as I am aware, this has been borne out in this northern locale.

Harrogate is a well-to-do area of Yorkshire, as is York, and it seems that those who pay most get most. It looks to me that the areas of Scarborough and Bridlington (not well-to-do areas) do not receive as much financial support as the more well-off areas, and obviously the needs of the electorate cannot be met from such an arms-length organisation. I think your reported fears are real and as someone who lives here, I do not support it.

B Ward

✉ Letter

DELAYED ELECTIONS

Dear Editor,

The Government is cancelling local elections for over FIVE MILLION voters. They won't have the chance to hold their councils or their councillors to account. They won't have any say on the biggest changes to local democracy in 50 years.

The Government claims that it's just a delay for one year, but it's widely predicted that it will be two or three years until council reorganisation is complete.

That's too long to go without a say. Democracy delayed is democracy denied.

The Government should think again and voters should get to exercise their right to vote this May as planned.

Stephen Akerman

POLLING STATION

West Marina Development

Proposals for development of the old bathing pool site at West Marina are still awaited from West St Leonards Marina Limited (WSLML), the subsidiary of County Gate Properties which holds a lease for this purpose.

The company has let it be known that its representatives have already been "discussing" its plans with members of the Hastings Borough Council Cabinet, and that a "public consultation" will ensue at the end of March.

A spokesperson for the council indicated at the end of last week that Cllrs Julia Hilton and Glenn Hafenden, leader and deputy leader respectively, were due to meet with the County Gate team for a briefing "in the next couple of weeks".

As reported in HIP 269, the residents of West St Leonards have already embarked on their own con-

sultation process by holding an exhibition and workshop of potential development ideas for the site. The feedback showed almost universal approval for earmarking the eastern end of the site as a leisure destination with low buildings (if any), play areas, gardens, retail and hospitality - ideally, in the opinion of some, with a reversion to a tidal pool or on-land lido. Others endorsed plans for a wide-ranging sports centre/outdoor gym and/or for a "village green" with space for yoga, music and drama events, and an amphitheatre or bandstand.

Although there was some support for "as many affordable homes as possible", it was generally agreed that any housing should be confined to the west end of the site, probably high-rise - though, if so, "of an iconic design".

No End Date for A21 Chaos

East Sussex County Council still cannot provide an estimated completion date for the massively delayed Queensway Gateway link road off the A21 out of Hastings.

A spokesperson could only say it was a "large and complex infrastructure project which we are committed to completing as soon as possible."

Investigatory inspections and ecology works were completed last month but the next stage of the project apparently involves a "challenging diversion of a water main

pipe in the A21 embankment."

ESCC did not respond to HIP readers' concerns that frequently they can see no work at all being carried out when they finally get through the tailbacks to the single lane traffic control under the Ridge bridge.

The spokesperson said: "We are continuing to work with our delivery partners on options to accelerate construction, including night time working, and will provide more information to the local community as soon as we can."

Alright Jack

Hastings Traditional Jack in the Green has been awarded £23,572 through Arts Council National Lottery Project Grants. The money will contribute to the costs of this year's festival on 5 May - the May Day Bank Holiday.

The future of the free local May Day procession and celebration, which is well-loved and enjoyed by local people, visitors, and folk enthusiasts nationally and worldwide, had been in doubt because of a lack of funding and commitment from Hastings Borough Council. The Council allocated just £5,000 of funding to the event last year, leaving the organising committee to dig into its reserves to cover the shortfall.

Keith Leech, the founder and current chair of the organising committee, said the Arts Council funding would ensure the event

definitely takes place this year. The money will be used to employ local artists, with free family-friendly workshops and activities at venues all around the town, including at the Hastings Museum, Ore Community Library, the Fishermen's Museum and Stade Hall.

This year's festival will build on its education and outreach programme, working with schools and community groups to raise awareness amongst local people, and encourage them to actively participate in the celebration.

Whilst Hastings Traditional Jack in the Green is secure for this year, Keith Leech emphasised that, "we are not out of the woods yet." The future of the popular event will "require the continuing support of Hastings Borough Council and local people if it is to continue."

We would love to hear from you.

✉ letters@hastingsindependentpress.co.uk

f facebook.com/hastingsindependent

📷 instagram.com/hastingsindependent

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

The Trashy Side of Hastings

TONY COLLINS: a Green councillor for Central St Leonards

It's a true privilege to be a councillor in Hastings. The work is intense, but sometimes you can make a genuine difference to someone's well-being. Other days, it's like wading through treacle.

Every councillor regularly reports fly tipping, graffiti, litter and dog mess. Early in January we all encountered abandoned Christmas trees. I found one specimen, still in its pot, in the middle of the pavement in Norman Road, where pedestrians had to step around it. I called it in, and it was collected the next day. The owner clearly thought: just leave it, the council will sort it out.

Soon it will be spring, and seagulls and foxes will be searching for food for their young. Torn plastic sacks will spill their litter, creating a revolting mess for the overstretched clean-up teams. Most residents put their waste out on schedule, but there are always a few who leave rubbish out the previous night, or can't be bothered to check the collection

times. Communal bins – so often overwhelmed – are for residents in those roads and not for anyone to come and dump their rubbish.

What makes me angry is that this kind of thing costs you money. It's your council tax that pays for people's bad behaviour.

The situation is not hopeless, however. The Green administration in Hastings recently set up a fresh contract for rubbish collection. Hastings is part of the East Sussex Joint Waste Partnership, along with Wealden and Rother. The deal with Biffa – worth approximately £119m over seven years – will include improved environmental credentials, with the new fleet of waste collection vehicles being operated on hydrotreated vegetable oil, a move which should reduce carbon emissions by up to 90%.

We agreed the extension early so the Biffa team has time to prepare for the weekly food waste collection that comes into force in 2026. This



should reduce the number of snacks left out to tempt scavengers and improve our recycling rates.

Another recent development is the introduction of a national deposit return scheme on plastic bottles and drinks cans. From October 2027 consumers will be able to return empty containers for cash. Many European countries have already adopted this system, with remarkable results: in Germany return rates stand at 98%. HBC has just passed a motion in support of Plastic Free Hastings, to reduce the volume of single-use plastics.

Many local businesses rely on the tourist trade. Keeping beaches tidy

is a challenge, which is why I am very pleased that the Foreshore Trust, which I chair, has found money for a full-time beach cleaner, 364 days a year.

Could you get involved by volunteering? A beach clean will take place on Sunday 9 March, 10am, meeting at Hastings Pier. Tidy Up St Leonards and Tidy Up Hastings do a brilliant job, and always need more volunteers. Cllr Jo Walker is trying to get a similar initiative going in Ore, and has set up a hub of litter picking equipment in Ore Community Centre.

One of the central tenets of Hastings Greens is to foster civic pride.

There is so much to enjoy here. The Town Deal funds will shortly provide a face-lift for the town centre. St Leonards is rapidly becoming a foodie destination, with new eateries appearing virtually every month. We have the annual Battle of Hastings at the BMX Source Park, the Hastings International Piano Competition, the Hastings International Chess Congress, the Hastings World Crazy Golf Championship; the list goes on.

Not all of it is consequential. Two public compost bins were recently installed in Gensing Gardens. A Wassail was organised to celebrate the occasion, graced by performances from Raven Drummers and Morris side Rheda's Dream, both in full regalia. At least 100 people turned up, all for a pair of compost bins.

A plea: please show your pride in our town.

- Check collection times before putting out your waste. Don't leave plastic bags out overnight.
- If something needs collecting, contact the council's Bulky Waste service. HBC collection charges are among the lowest in the county. Don't rely on unlicensed operators: that's a direct route to fly tipping.
- If you see graffiti, or fly tipping, or dog mess, please report it via My Hastings.

Consider joining Tidy Up St Leonards or Tidy Up Hastings – details on Facebook.

STRIVE HASTINGS Goes into Battle

After a challenging January for many local businesses, a new initiative has launched with the aim of bringing business owners together.

STRIVE HASTINGS is the brainchild of Gemma Dearman, of The Good Place Café/Bar in Hastings Town Centre, who told HIP: "STRIVE is the result of many months of frustration regarding tough trading conditions for our beloved town. With the announcement of a handful of key independent businesses closing their doors, I just felt the time was right to do something.

"The aim is to get people together, sharing ideas and working together to get the town's businesses thriving again."

Gemma has gained support from regional business support organisation, the Let's Do Business Group, and James Thomas, a retail and hospital-ity consultant who lives in Hastings.

STRIVE HASTINGS

Emily Wright, from Let's Do Business Group said: "I am really pleased to be able to support Gemma and James, two very passionate local business leaders who want to help improve the town's business areas. Let's Do Business Group will

help bring the project to life and provide help to businesses that need it."

James added: "Hastings is an incredible town and STRIVE is the creative ideas space where business people can bring their different skills and energy to make a difference. That's what makes this so exciting."

After a successful first meeting at the end of January, the STRIVE team are looking to meet again on Wednesday 5 March from 6:30pm-8:30pm at The Good Place at 53 Havelock Road. The initiative covers Hastings and St Leonards and all business owners are welcome to attend.



To find out more, go to @strive_hastings on Instagram or email hello@strive-hastings.co.uk

Disabled Facilities Grants Improve Residents' Lives

The council is continuing its Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) scheme to support residents in need of home adaptations.

Between October and December 2024, 30 DFGs were approved for 42 adaptations, totalling almost £350,000. Three of these were for children, and they included adaptations on housing association properties, private landlord-owned properties and owner occupiers. In the same period, 38 DFGs were completed for 58 adaptations, totalling more than £670,000.

Last year a DFG helped a resident who needed an urgent home adaptation. The older resident, who had recently had an operation, was living on only one floor of her home. When her son was due to have his own hospital stay, she needed a stairlift and accessible bath. The entire process, from the initial request to the installation, only took a week and meant that the resident was able to stay at home rather than go into respite care.

A DFG is a grant of up to £30,000. It is means-tested and allows home-

owners or tenants to have adaptations made to their homes, allowing them better freedom of movement and giving access to essential facilities within the home. The funding is provided by the government and can only be spent on home adaptations.

Cllr Glenn Haffenden, deputy leader and lead councillor for housing and community wellbeing, said: "The work that our housing improvements team does is making a real difference to residents' lives. The quick work to get the funding and work agreed is a great example of this. Making adaptations to homes can literally change someone's life, and our housing renewals team is always keen to help make these changes where possible."



Find out more about Disabled Facilities Grants and the process of applying on the council website:

hastings.gov.uk/housing/improvement/dfg.

New Housing Co-op Gets Green Light

CHRIS CONNELLEY

Sharon Rhodes is a woman on a mission. Hastings born and bred, she is determined to provide co-operative housing for local people in need, an ambition that moved a step closer in January when her Maslow Housing Co-operative was successfully incorporated.

This means the organisation is now legally constituted and gives Sharon the green light to seek funds and properties to turn the dream into reality.

A community led housing initiative dedicated to providing affordable, supportive living environments that foster connection and personal growth.

Part-time social media consult-

ant Sharon is one of three directors, along with drug and alcohol worker Adam 'Iafra' Daniels and ex-merchant seaman Mark Shipley.

The Maslow Housing Co-operative is named after American psychologist Abraham Maslow, whose hierarchy of needs is a staple of self-development training programmes. Developed after World War II, it outlines a set of stages of human development from the fulfilment of basic physiological needs like water and shelter through self actualisation, where we realise our potential, to a higher state of transcendence, which is all about going beyond self by helping others.

With support from an angel investor, a wealthy individual willing to take a punt on a new venture, Maslow Housing Co-operative are hoping to purchase their first prop-

erty this spring; they will refurbish the property themselves to provide nine bedrooms for members.

"The flagship house will provide a safe and nurturing space for up to nine co-operative members with an emphasis on informal care and support from fellow members, and these core members will work together to run the project in the future," explained Sharon.

From this single property, the plan is to acquire a new property a year for the next ten years, with the aim of scaling up the operation to become a significant specialist player in the borough's housing market.

The team are also planning to support their venture by opening a "community-focused cafe and event space" to provide training and development and to raise funds to support their ambitious expansion plans.

An excited Sharon commented: "This is a massive project for me that is becoming my life's work, one which addresses an urgent need in the town and helps some of our most vulnerable residents."

To find out more about Maslow Housing Co-operative, see their Instagram site at [instagram.com/maslowhc](https://www.instagram.com/maslowhc)

Our Town Has Plenty

CAF FEAN tells HIP about a new podcast where she & Patsy Solanki talk about what's going on in town

Patsy and I have been mates for tenish years. We're involved in or connected to several community groups in Hastings, St Leonards and further-a-field. What really gets us going is how very wonderful Hastings & St Leonards is, and how there's always so much going on... it's hard to keep up.

Insatiably curious, we often stop to speak with taxi drivers, shop keepers, market stallholders, friends, artists, colleagues as well as people we just bump into in the street. We connect the dots, enjoy a good chat and love making connections.

We decided to launch a podcast, where we have a natter over a cuppa about what exactly IS happening,

before it happens, and share it as far and wide as the Hastings and St Leonards word-of-mouth network reaches.

If you'd like to get in touch with us to highlight something on the podcast, please email a picture, a short description, your contact details and any social media love handles that you care to add.



Instagram: [ourtown.has.plenty](https://www.instagram.com/ourtown.has.plenty)
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MORE BUS LESS FUSS



Funded by
UK Government



single fares
for just

£1, £2 or £3

on buses
in East Sussex

find out more:

[eastsussex.gov.uk
/bus-fares](https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/bus-fares)





HASTINGS FAT TUESDAY MUSIC FESTIVAL

5 days of MUSIC & MARDI GRAS on the South Coast

28TH FEB TO
4TH MAR 2025

FRIDAY 28 FEBRUARY

UNCONVENTION

THE EAST HASTINGS SEA
ANGLING ASSOCIATION

10AM-6PM. £5.00

A ONE-DAY GRASSROOTS MUSIC CONFERENCE
FEATURING PANELLISTS FROM ACROSS THE
MUSIC INDUSTRY SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCE
AND IDENTIFYING SOME OF THE CHALLENGES
FOR ARTISTS IN THE MODERN ERA. SURROUND
YOURSELF WITH LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE TO
EXPLORE THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF HOW
TO MAKE A CAREER IN MUSIC VIABLE.

SATURDAY 1 MARCH

UNPLUGGED SATURDAY

ACROSS HASTINGS &
ST LEONARDS

1PM-6PM. FREE

A PACKED AFTERNOON OF
ACOUSTIC MUSIC SESSIONS,
AS 60 EMERGING AND ESTABLISHED
ARTISTS AND BANDS ACROSS ALL
GENRES PLAY 15-MINUTE
SETS AT PARTICIPATING VENUES.

SATURDAY 1 MARCH

UNDER THE RADAR

THE PIPER

8PM-1AM. FREE

MISS MELODY
DANK FRANK
LEVI BATKIN
AND DJ'S
CRUCIAL
DUE COURSE
PHIZZ



SATURDAY 1 MARCH

SONICS

THE PIG

8PM-2AM. FREE

FOR 2025, THE MAIN
SPACE OF THE SATURDAY
SONICS EVENING SESSION
HAS BEEN CURATED AND
PROGRAMMED BY EIDA &
SOY.



SATURDAY 1 MARCH

CABARET, COMEDY & DRAG BINGO

WHITE ROCK
THEATRE

7.30PM.

£16.05 - £21.55

JOE BLACK
ELEKTRA FENCE
HEATHER DUSTER & KIN
HOSTED BY AARON TWITCHEN

SUNDAY 2 MARCH

UMBRELLA PARADE

FROM SEAFRONT
PROMENADE- BOTTOM
OF LONDON ROAD,
ST LEONARDS AT 12PM,
FINISHING AT THE
WHITE ROCK THEATRE

12PM. FREE

THE UMBRELLA PARADE FILLS
THE STREETS WITH COLOUR,
LIVE MUSIC, DANCERS, AND
FESTIVAL-GOERS OF ALL AGES.

SUNDAY 2 MARCH

PRESERVATION SUNDAY

WHITE ROCK THEATRE

12.30-3PM.

FREE ALL AGES

THE CULMINATION OF THE UMBRELLA
PARADE IS A FAMILY-FRIENDLY PARTY
FOR ALL! ENJOY FOOD AND DRINK AND
GREAT MUSIC, AS THE RIVALRY OF THE
SECOND LINE BRASS BANDS COMES TO
A HEAD IN A DRAMATIC PLAY-OFF.



SUNDAY 2 MARCH

THEE SUNDAY SONICS

THE PIG

1PM-8PM. FREE

THEE SUNDAY SONICS, A FREE ENTRY,
AFTERNOON SESSION OF LIVE MUSIC FROM
OUTSIDE THE MAINSTREAM. AS PART OF A
PLANNED YEAR OF ACTIVITIES TO CELEBRATE
THEIR 10TH YEAR, SONICS WELCOMES BACK
ARTISTS THAT HAVE PERFORMED IN PREVIOUS
YEARS IN AMONGST FRESH ACTS APPEARING
IN THE BACKROOM OF THE PIG. EXPECT
IMPROVISED WEIRDNESS, MATH ROCK
MINIMALISM, NO-WAVE SKRONK AND
JUNGLE VIA VINTAGE ELECTRONICS.

MONDAY 3 MARCH

SLIM MONDAY

THE LORD NELSON

8PM. FREE

THE ANNUAL PRE-FAT TUESDAY PARTY
HOSTED BY AWARD WINNING ARTIST
TOBY BARELLI AT OLD TOWN FAVOURITE
THE LORD NELSON. EXPECT THE FULL KING
SIZE SLIM HEAVYWEIGHT ACOUSTICS BAND
DIRECT FROM ABOARD THE M/V SEA WITCH
AND VERY SPECIAL GUESTS FROM ACROSS
THE AMAZING HASTINGS MUSIC SCENE.

TUESDAY 4 MARCH

FAT TUESDAY TOUR

8PM-11PM. FREE

A RAUCOUS CELEBRATION OF ALL
THINGS MARDI GRAS, THE FAT
TUESDAY TOUR IS THE MAIN EVENT -
A WHIRLWIND OF MUSIC, MERRY-
MAKING AND MORE MUSIC. TWELVE
VENUES HOST THE FAT TUESDAY
TOUR, WHERE 24 ESTABLISHED ACTS
PLAY 20-MINUTE SETS IN 3 VENUES
EACH. BRACE YOURSELVES!

TUESDAY 4 MARCH

REGGAE ROOM

THE EAST HASTINGS SEA
ANGLING ASSOCIATION

6PM-LATE. FREE

HOSTED BY MIGHTY SOUNDS AND
MUSICAL SPARRING PARTNERS &
HASTINGS VETERAN REGGAE SOUND
SYSTEM THE DUB GENERALS THIS
YEAR'S SHOW IS SET TO BE AN
EXTRAVAGANZA OF ORIGINAL ROOTS
AND DANCE-HALL RIDDIMS FEATURING
MIGHTY SOUNDS LIVE BAND & DUB
GENERALS SOUND SYSTEM!

TUESDAY 4 MARCH

AFTER PARTY

THE PIG

10PM-3AM. £10

18+
DJ SETS
JACK (KID KAPICHI)
AND FIENDS & OPDJS
SEE FAT TUESDAY OUT
IN STYLE WITH DJ'S
'TILL THE EARLY HOURS!
GET YOUR TICKETS
FROM THE WEBSITE!

hastingsfattuesday.co.uk



FRIDAY 28TH FEB

WHITE ROCK THEATRE 8PM-3AM
£35 (EARLYBIRD £29.50)

Le Grand MARDI GRAS BALL



FEATURING...

RIOGHPACH COPPOLLY AND HONEYFEET
MR WILSON'S SECOND LIPERS DJ SETS BY
JUSTIN ROBERTSON AND JON CARTER
+ LATE NIGHT DJ SET **LEMUR BEATS** IN THE STUDIO



Beyond the Job Description

Bexhill-based FERDUSARA ALI outlines the systemic racism she encountered while working in Children's Services for East Sussex County Council and the endemic racial prejudice she and her siblings endured throughout their childhood in Britain

Growing up, my reality was far from idyllic. In a community often driven by prejudice, discrimination, and racism, I witnessed my parents being ridiculed for the colour of their skin. I saw first-hand the struggles my family – particularly my brothers – had to endure. Those formative experiences have woven themselves into a tapestry of memories – some tinged with laughter as my brothers reminisce about their past hardships. Yet for me, those moments carry a heavy weight, as if the wounds have never fully healed.

I vividly remember the times spent in our old housing estate, where the very neighbours who once savoured the aroma of my mother's cooking were the ones hurling bricks at our windows, shouting racial slurs and demanding, "Fuck off, you Paki! Go back to your own country!" Despite hearing those derogatory words countless times, I still feel the terror that gripped me as a five-year-old girl. That fear followed me into adulthood, ultimately leading me to grapple with the internalised hatred thrust upon me.

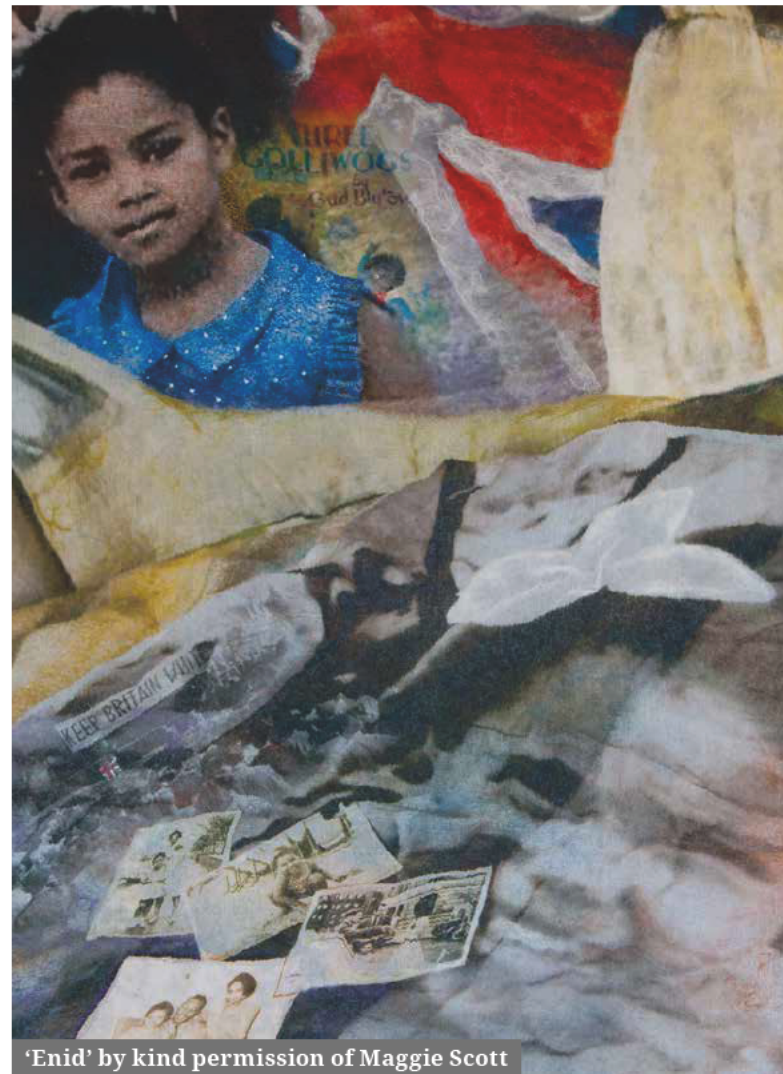
The loss of love for the colour of my skin – deemed 'ugly' by those who do not share my features – lingers deeply within me. This wound has profoundly shaped my perspective and continues to cast a long shadow over my life. Despite the wave of protests and bold promises that emerged following the tragic death of George Floyd, movements like Black Lives Matter – which I witnessed in Alexandra Park – and various anti-racism efforts advocating the recognition, value, and dignity of people of colour, they have yet to bring about substantial change.

HOLLOW DISCRIMINATION PLEDGES

However, systemic racism remains deeply entrenched, with grand anti-racism initiatives often devolving into mere facades that offer only temporary solace in a landscape that urgently demands genuine

transformation. The pledges made to combat discrimination in education, employment, housing, and law enforcement frequently prove hollow – a predictable outcome in regions like East Sussex. I'm not at all surprised, given its historical context, which isn't historical at all; it's more an ongoing manifestation of racial behaviours and rhetoric. I have personally witnessed the appalling realities that persist in this environment.

During my tenure with the Children's Services Department of East Sussex County Council, I encountered a deeply troubling work environment characterised by systemic racism, unprofessional conduct,



'Enid' by kind permission of Maggie Scott

to continue in a role that took an immense toll on my mental health. The racial and often homophobic rhetoric projected onto staff by the young

fucking Paki," and the "N-word" were among the derogatory slurs often dismissed by both staff and management. These experiences were not isolated to me; my colleagues faced similar hostility.

One incident stands out as the final straw during my time at a particular children's home. I felt increasingly unsafe working with a young person who had previously exhibited extreme racism. In a shocking escalation, he threw a ketchup bottle at me with full force, screaming, "You fucking Paki! Go back to your own country!" When I went to inform the senior staff member on duty about the verbal and physical attack, she challenged me, saying, "Well, you have no one to cover your shift," dismissing my distress in the face of such blatant aggression.

ESCAPE THE CONSEQUENCES

To make matters worse, the only recourse available in East Sussex was to report incidents to the Sussex Police. Unfortunately, this often proved ineffective, as the police would frequently attempt to dissuade you from pressing charges, citing their reluctance to "criminalise" young individuals due to their age. So, while grappling with the trauma of being racially abused at work, the young people returned home, bragging and boasting about their experiences of being arrested. This created a troubling dynamic: when racial or other incidents oc-

curred again, these young individuals knew they could essentially escape the consequences of their actions. After witnessing so many previous incidents go unpunished, in their minds, what would make this time – this new arrest – any different?

Ironically, my experience of racial abuse in a children's home is neither unique nor unprecedented. Numerous reports have documented instances of racism faced by staff from BAME backgrounds in similar settings. For example, a 2019 study published by the Children's Commissioner for England revealed that staff frequently encountered discriminatory remarks and behaviours from the very young people they were meant to support, leaving them feeling unsafe and unsupported. In 2020, a report by The Independent highlighted the experiences of several foster carers and residential workers who spoke out about being undermined and marginalised by management. Further research by The Children's Society has shown that staffing shortages in children's homes contribute to increased stress and burnout among workers, many of whom come from minority backgrounds. This lack of adequate staffing and support exacerbates existing issues of racism and discrimination, making it difficult for staff to effectively address the problems they encounter. Additionally, in 2019 an article produced by Community Care raised similar concerns about the culture within some children's services, describing it as "toxic." Workers reported experiences of bullying, discrimination, and a lack of support from management.

IT COMES WITH THE JOB

In 2025, it is deeply troubling that employees from minority backgrounds continue to encounter discrimination and racism in the workplace, often dismissed by management. Historically, both verbal and physical discrimination have been viewed as inherent aspects of roles within Children's Services, with a former manager infamously stating that "It comes with the job." This normalised and dismissive attitude toward such pervasive issues is wholly unacceptable.

While some may argue that the young people involved are simply "vulnerable children," the core issue lies in the systemic and institutionalised nature of these biases. It is imperative for job descriptions in Children's Services to explicitly acknowledge the potential for discrimination and racism, enabling individuals from minority backgrounds to make informed decisions about these roles. Furthermore, it is crucial to recognise that exposing already traumatised, marginalised individuals to an environment where chronic racism is embedded perpetuates a continuous act of dehumanisation. This reality strikes at the very heart of identity and dignity, and it is we who suffer, not them.

"In 2025, it is deeply troubling that employees from minority backgrounds continue to encounter discrimination and racism in the workplace."

and a complete lack of staff support. My experiences were far from normal or acceptable; I often found myself signed off due to the stress stemming from both the job and the people I was working with – particularly the management. Despite repeatedly voicing my concerns about the racial abuse that I and others endured, our complaints were often met with criticism and dismissal rather than comfort or empathy. Management would brush aside our worries, callously stating that this type of treatment was "part of the job," suggesting that if it became "too much to handle," we should simply leave.

But it was never that simple. As the job market deteriorated, I found myself trapped, with no choice but

people in our care – behaviours often minimised as mere "low-level racism" – ultimately led to a state of desensitisation among us.

'GO BACK TO THE COTTON FIELD'

While management continued to pacify the unacceptable conduct of the young people, allowing their actions to go unchecked, a tumultuous cycle ensued. Staff members, many of whom looked like me, were left to lean on each other for support that the organisation failed to provide, all while being expected to "get on with it." As my employment continued, the comments grew worse: "Go back to the cotton field," "At least I'm not as dark as my shoe," "Return to Somalia, you



XED in his second phase

The Art of Tattoo, and After

VICTORIA KINGHAM

Imagine an extraordinary body of work by a dedicated tattooist, essentially an artist, a man who became, through illness, unable to use a tattoo marker, and turned to something completely different. At the notable, externally-decorated Ruby's Rooms on the seafront, you can see this unique collection of work.

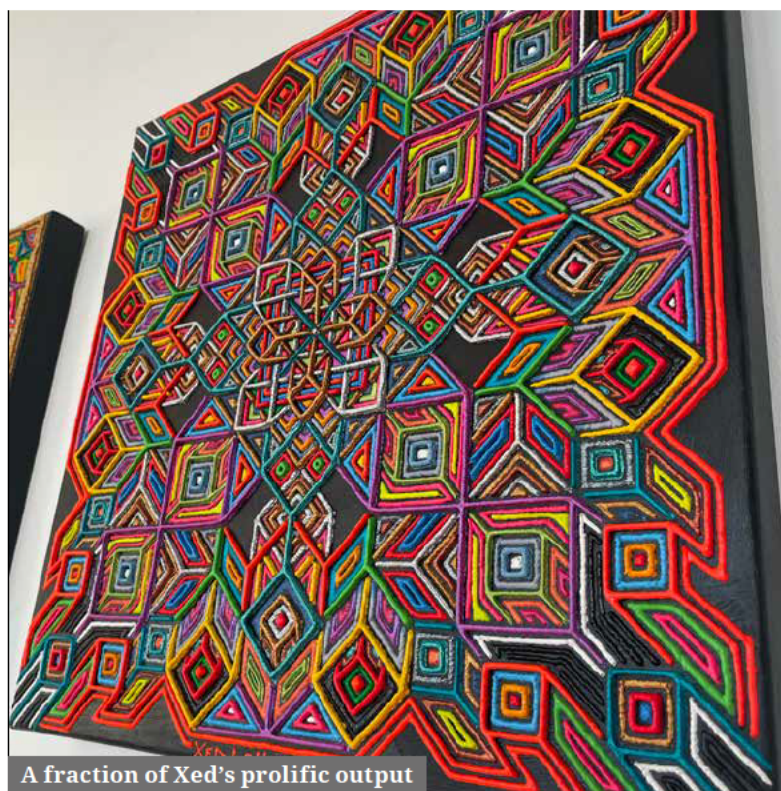
Xed (pronounced Zed) Le Head was for many years revered as an innovator and expert in the world of tattooing. "A tattoo God. A Legend" wrote Touka Voodoo of the Stockholm Alternative, a Bespoke and Holistic tattoo parlour. Xed's tattoo work was internationally famous, exhibited in venues as far as Eastern Europe and Japan. He loved it and dedicated his life to it.

Soon after he met his wife Wiggy, disease began to disintegrate his spine and he was confined to a wheelchair, with only limited use of his arms. However, Wiggy became his carer and amanuensis. She prepared his canvases and his paint and his tools and he developed a way of working by squeezing paint out through an icing tube, on to comput-



Xed at the height of tattoo fame

erised designs on canvas or board. He worked incessantly – the paint is thickly layered and the resulting works highly textured – and as he finished one outline in these mandala-type creations, they set it to dry and he began another, going back to the previous one when the layer was dry, and so on and so on, having six or seven in progress each day. The result is this unique collection,



A fraction of Xed's prolific output

which must be seen to be appreciated. The photographs don't do justice to their detail or their viscerality.

The domestic space at Ruby's Rooms, run as an arthouse-led bed-and-breakfast, is two doors away from where Xed lived and worked, and he and the owners were friends. The show is therefore more than simply an objective demonstration of work; it's a tribute to him, his work, his life and his friendship.

While many human beings carry his art around on their bodies wherever they go, this particular body, of artwork, is left to posterity. I have to confess that I've never understood the reason for tattooing. Self-adornment, I can appreciate. But the idea of a permanent blue picture on your pristine, precious, vulnerable skin, for ever and ever – not for me. I'd want to wash the pictures off after a while and replace them with new ones, and, like the sand designs of the Holi festival or the sand Mandalas of Tibetan Buddhists, their impermanence and their mutability would be part of their statement. But Wiggy patiently began to explain to me what her tattoos meant. "They're a record of my life that I carry with me", she said. "Each one is significant. Each one contains a story, an episode." And I begin to understand, just a little. If Art is about Life, if Art in general is a permanent and significant chronicle of social and historical events, then the unique personal adornment of tattoos is exactly that, but for one individual.

Xed Le Head and Wiggy met because initially she went in to be adorned by him. Their joint creative journey has been unique, piquant, and ultimately uplifting even after Xed's death. On her face is inked a symbol which, she tells me, is a special Tibetan design. She says that since she has had it on her cheeks many people have been attracted to talk to her; that the symbol has been

for her a means of communication and connection. Xed taught her everything about its meaning and significance to the Buddhist religion. He also taught her how to tat-

too herself. Each of her self-tattoos therefore make her, her art, her persona, her self, into a one-ness. For her, the blue marks are an extension of spiritual awareness. The thing she can't understand, she says, is when someone walks into a tattoo shop and says he wants that picture on his arm or his forehead (or buttocks or left ear, or whatever piece of his body happens to be available).

This exhibition was a learning experience for me. What happened to Xed Le Head was unfair; what he has left behind is, like his body art, a permanent, life-affirming memory. Perry Rule, editor of *Total Tattoo* magazine, recently wrote:

"He was a visionary, an innovator, and an influencer in the truest sense of the word – but more than that, he was a friend. And there are many, many other people who will say that too. We will all miss him. Fly high, fly free Xed."

A Tribe Called Xed is showing at Ruby's Rooms, 54 Eversfield Place, TN37 6DB. Total Tattoo website at totaltattoo.co.uk Contact for details for this and future exhibitions and for rooms, Kate Jagers at rubby-andnorm@gmail.com, or Rubys-rooms.com

ST LEONARDS CHURCH SATURDAY MARKET



Arts, Crafts, Antiques & Collectibles
Vintage Chic, Clothes & Jewellery
Coffee, Food Court & Licensed Bar!

OPEN EVERY SATURDAY 10am to 4pm
London Road (corner of Pevensey Rd)
Saint Leonards-on-Sea TN37 6AS
stleoschurch.co.uk

Ammonites at the Museum

NICK PELLING

There are certain subjects that baffle the human mind. For example, I do not know what a proton or a quark is. And I know this is embarrassing, but I don't even understand Euclid's parallel postulate. And even more embarrassing than that, I don't really know what an algorithm is, even though they are apparently the invisible digi-creatures that rule our current world.

But one of the most mind-defying subjects is surely what they call geological time periodisation. As we all roughly know, a few hundred years ago men with beards decided that the very, very, very long ago could be neatly divided up into named segments. But, even if we take just one of those segments, say the Cretaceous period, it is bamboozling, mainly because this time segment was, apparently, seventy-seven million years in duration. I don't know about you, but I find that my brain itself becomes a block of impermeable rock when confronted with such a notion. So, possibly we need a more sensitive way to think into that vast abyss of time gone by. Maybe artists can help.

THE JURASSIC MIND

The SoCo artists group currently have an exhibition at the Hastings Museum and Art Gallery entitled *Stories From Deep Time*, which seeks to use the rich fossil record of our area—much of which is part of the Museum's display—as an inspiration for art. The result is an incredibly diverse exhibition, which doesn't so much seek to un-baffle our minds, as just try to use imagination and creative mess to find another way into the Jurassic chambers of our sensual brains.

Doubtless all visitors to the show will have different favourites. At an amusingly almost literal level, I was very taken with Samantha Guertin's paintings of female bathers at Pett Level, scampering about with skittish dinosaurs. As though dinosaurs had summer holidays. But there is so much else. Cheryl Bell offers an extraordinary and eccentric cabinet of curiosities, loosely themed around the work of the polymath Teilhard de Chardin.

ROCK RIFFING

Agness Clark produced two large pieces entitled *Fossil Memories*, which imply that our own experiences lie in our minds like fossilising regrets and passions. There is, it



The First Flower, print by Emily Johns

seems, an inexhaustible range of ways to riff from the notion of such irretrievable chasms of chrono-distance. Several artists seek to use coastline or leftover materials as some sort of conduit to the past. Fiona Denning, for example, thoughtfully explores wax and sand and unctuous paint as possible portholes. Emily Johns' *The First Flower* takes a different route, smashing together

an aggressive skeleton with notions of aboriginal petals and oil rigs: powerful stuff in raw black and white. There isn't enough space here to do justice to all the artists on show; probably best to just go and see this wonderful, free exhibition for yourself.

Overall, the exhibition cannot be neatly summed up. It is perhaps as baffling as the geological riddles that so entranced seaside stumblers of

the Enlightenment era. But that is, in a sense, the point—to creep up on this world of inexplicable strangeness from a myriad of angles all at the same time. Still, the heavy veil of the past will always, to some extent, leave us sketching in the dark.

The Exhibition is on at Hastings Museum and Art Gallery until April 27.



Kristin Hersh of Throwing Muses

The Individualism of Throwing Muses

SEAN KITCHING

Formed in 1980 in Newport, Rhode Island by Kristin Hersh and stepsister Tanya Donnelly, Throwing Muses deserve to be mentioned alongside the vanguard of what later became known as alternative or college rock in the US. Notably R.E.M., the Feelies, the Violent Femmes and The Replacements date back as far as that, others later. Throwing Muses were the first

of many American bands to be signed by British label 4AD, who also had Cocteau Twins and Dead Can Dance on their distinguished roster. I've personally been a fan since I first saw them play alongside Pixies some 37 years ago, so it was welcome news that this year they would be touring a new album, *Moonlight Concessions*, particularly as the tour included a first-time stop in Hastings.

According to Hersh, the album is titled after the concessions stand (snack bar) at Moonlight Beach in

Encinitas, California, where she wrote its songs whilst briefly living there amongst displaced and homeless people. "I wrote a lot of the songs there on that beach," she told me, "and one day I was just staring at the ocean wrestling with a lot of songs playing at the same time in my head, focusing to the point where I had sort of forgotten to eat or sleep. The concessions stand guy gave me this huge, life-saving drink of fizzy water with a little slice of lemon on top, and as soon as I sat

down with it, I knew how these songs should be played." Empathy on such a simple, yet not simplistic, human level is key to the new album, with each song a story told in a direct and instantly affecting manner that recalls the style of short story writer and poet Raymond Carver.

Having famously told Warner Brothers where to go in the mid-90s, trading her first solo album, *Hips and Makers*, for her contractual freedom, Hersh has been fiercely independent and highly productive ever since. Hersh says: "I write Throwing Muses songs on my Stratocaster or my Telecaster, 50 Foot Wave songs on my SG or my Les Paul and solo songs on my Collings." When I ask her whether, on the forthcoming tour, fans can expect material from her extensive back catalogue, Hersh says: "Stuck in time? That's not music, that's fashion. We have a timeless approach, so we're really happy to play old songs. We don't care which record they were on, if any."

To listen, try albums *The Real Ramona* (1991) and/or *Limbo* (1995).

Throwing Muses play Hastings White Rock Studio on 28 May. *Moonlight Concessions* will be released via Fire Records on 14 March. Sean Kitching writes for *The Quietus*.





TERENCE SPENCER, PAPER PHOTO

The Soundtrack and the Fury

EBM HUMPHREYS
and VICTORIA KINGHAM

From its description, *Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat*, a feature documentary by Johan Grimonprez, which showed at Kino last Wednesday, sounds as though it might be a story about African-American jazz musicians involved in a 1960s protest group, perhaps trying to bring attention to a crisis in Africa. The movie is in fact a thrilling and mesmerising visual and musical essay, on the jaw-droppingly disgraceful response of European colonisers and their US bedfellows to the potent beginnings of decolonisation in Africa during the Cold War.

Ghana became independent in 1957 and Congo wanted to follow suit – by 1960 they had met in Belgium to agree terms. As despots tend towards despotism, so the Belgians delivered an insulting puppet-version of independence, requiring the democratically-elected leader Patrice Lumumba to take a stand. All centres

on the country's natural wealth, particularly its vast uranium deposits – of course it does – and the US's not-very-Cold desire to amass arms.

Amongst other things, this film reveals a refreshing perspective on Russia's role as a world power – not via the director's opinions but via archive footage of Nikita Khrushchev making speeches, joyfully thumping his fists and bear-hugging his way through numerous UN assemblies in New York and ultimately proposing that colonialism be banned. Also priceless here is footage of Fidel Castro making his way to the UN, meeting with Malcolm X, and the latter's holiday photos.

This prize-winning narrative draws heavily on autobiographical works by prolific political activist and human rights advocate Andrée Blouin (*My Country, Africa*) and by In Koli Jean Bofane (*Congo Inc.*) and Conor Cruise O'Brien (*To Katanga and Back*), using visual captions to pepper the story with astonishing insights and revelations.

But the thrill it delivers comes from the way that the music of pro-

test, jazz, is not only referenced as the eponymous 'soundtrack' but presented with archive close-ups. To be clear, we are talking about the greats here – not only Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln who were directly involved in storming the UN, but Thelonious Monk, Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus, Eric Dolphy, John Coltrane, and many more. America publicly adopted, indeed exploited, Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie as ambassadors for a wholly American music – which of course, it is – yet in their own country they and all African-Americans were segregated, denied basic civil rights and resources, and treated as an underclass.

Thus the unconventional and 'free' jazz that emerged in the States during the fifties and sixties has always been much more than a musical revolution; it was bound up with emerging civil rights protest movements, and all of its major proponents were deeply aware of the paradox and hypocrisy endemic to a deeply racist culture. Several of Charles Mingus' compositions had titles that specifically referred to political events. Even earlier in the century, the brilliant Duke Ellington (who was not only a musical but a political trailblazer) demanded equal access to segregated dance halls and was active in supporting the NAACP. In the latter part of the 1960s Nina Simone was vociferous in her support of the Civil Rights movement.

The musical story is wonderfully told in this film; it isn't always chronologically parallel – it isn't meant to be – but the interspersed of the musical footage highlights racial attitudes within dominant colonial powers, a parallel struggle.

It's no surprise that this is up for Best Documentary Feature in this year's Oscars – and it can be found on various large streaming platforms (see justwatch.com) or purchased on DVD.

Kino-Teatr, Norman Road, St Leonards | kino-teatr.co.uk will hopefully show this film again later in the year when they hold their annual documentary week. Watch out for it.



ROSE HILL STUDIOS

Kazoos in the Cornet

BEN THOMPSON

Named in honour of the trumpet-like instrument they both play (rather than the wafer-based ice cream receptacle young children are traumatised by dropping), French experimental duo C(or)N(e)T make music that can fairly be characterised as "a treat". Now in his seventies, the senior partner in the enterprise – Meccano magician Pierre Bastien – is a serious figure in the international avant-garde whose infectiously playful music, often played on instruments made out of deconstructed toys, has earned him the rare distinction of three album releases on Apex Twin's Rephlex label. But it was his younger helpmeet Louis Laurain – whose own impressive list of previous collaborators ranges from composer Eliane Radigue to Sunn O)))'s Stephen O'Malley – who kindly answered my questions in advance of their eagerly awaited appearance at the Piper.

Louis has previously described C(or)N(e)T's music as "like cruising full speed on a homemade superson-

ic moped – a combination of experimental and joyful explosions, highly controlled rhythmic slippage and melodic improvised accidents". I asked him how this intriguing cross-generational interface came about: "In February 2023, Pierre had carte-blanc in Café Oto. He invited me to perform. Unfortunately his luggage never arrived at the airport, so he didn't play. I played two solo sets instead: Pierre went to his hotel before the show. I completely understand. It was so depressing. Anyway, his luggage arrived the day after..."

From these unpropitious beginnings, things could only get better. Next stop was the much-loved Rose Hill venue and studio space in Brighton, where their musical union was cemented to such joyous effect that plans were soon made to record an album. Recorded there over a week in the spring of last year, C(or)N(e)T's eponymous six-track debut sounds more like the work of an entire orchestra than two men and a metronome.

"I like to keep myself busy when I play," Louis explains, "so I use my hands (when we usually need only three fingers to press on the valve), my mouth, sometimes I sing, I tap my feet. I pluck bird calls, whistles, kazoos, from my cornet."



C(or)N(e)T – originally billed as C.N.T. but the name has been expanded because it looks rude on posters –

play the Piper on 25 February with OBTRAM3 and Effective Word Order. Tickets via dice.fm.

Virtuoso Bluesman Plays The Piper

Luckily for Hastings and St Leonards, the very accomplished blues rock guitarist Laurence Jones will play at The Piper on 21 February. Thirty two years old and born just outside Liverpool, Jones learned classical guitar from a very early age, and has gone on to win four British Blues Awards, including 'Young Artist of the Year' for three consecutive years.

Listening to his latest album *Bad Luck & The Blues* it is perhaps no surprise that his riff-driven songs and emotional solos were inspired by listening to his father's vinyl collection. In fact the magic of Jones' own music is the astute balance he achieves between time honoured 70s classic rock and a contemporary approach. A nostalgic listen, the album brings to mind Rory Gallagher, Tony

McPhee, Robin Trower *et al.* It has a power and energy that recalls all of these and other great blues guitarists, while aiming perhaps as much for perfection, as for originality.

The album reached number 1 in the 'Official UK Charts' and he was voted in the 'Top 10 Best Blues Rock Guitar players in the world today' by Music Radar. He has shared stages with major luminaries – Van Mor-

ison, Ringo Starr, the late Jeff Beck and Johnny Winter, Status Quo, and many others. He has also appeared at some of the world's most prestigious venues, including the Royal Albert Hall and New York's Carnegie Hall. The legendary, universally influential blues guru, Buddy Guy, once likened Laurence to "a young Eric Clapton", and in 2017 invited the youngster (then just 25) to join him onstage at the Holland International Blues Festival.

Virtuoso Jones' voice is soulful and gritty. He is known for being a songwriter, but his recent sets have also usually included highly-praised Hendrix covers. Whilst he is part of a long line of British rock guitar-

ists there is something quintessentially American about his song structures, the vocal harmonies and the strident guitar riffs.

Jones' band is clearly world class, and the fact that acts of this calibre are being hosted at a grassroots venue in the heart of St Leonards says a great deal for the quality of the venue and the enthusiasm of the fans. This promises to be a memorable gig so if there are tickets available today and you love the blues, don't delay.

Laurence Jones plays *The Piper*, St Leonards, on Friday 21 February at 7pm. Tickets £22, available at thepiper.club/events

HIP REVIEW

Demon Copperhead

By Barbara Kingsolver
Published by Faber 2022
REVIEW BY KATE WATERS

I have just read and greatly enjoyed this excellent book *Demon Copperhead* by the American novelist Barbara Kingsolver (available from Hastings Library). It is a re-working of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, the story of a young boy's life, but set in Lee County Virginia in the 1990s and 2000s. The book begins with the traumatic birth of Demon (real name Damon Fields) in a run-down trailer park to a teenage mother addicted to drugs and alcohol. His father has already died in an accident. So begins his odyssey through a life of poverty, struggle, and prejudice; and yet the quality of the writing is such that the story is often both tragic, poignant, funny, and enthralling all at once.

One of the mainstays of his life which helps the young Demon to survive is the long-suffering but warm and loving household of the Peggot family who run the trailer park and often provide a substitute home for the boy. When he is 10 years old Demon's mother marries a violent bullying man who asserts his control over both mother and son and seeks to isolate him from the Peggot's support. The battle of wills between the man and boy is excellently presented through Demon's eyes and movingly portrays the precariousness of a young child's existence in a hostile world.

His mother's overdose propels Demon into the arms of the State and describes his encounters with social workers and others in authority from a child's point of view: the jaded burnt-out professionals, the idealistic but naïve young social worker, afraid herself of the overbearing morose 'foster carer' that she leaves Demon with. He finds

himself as slave labour on a backwoods farm, sustained by the camaraderie of three other boys placed (or imprisoned) there and his first taste of illicit drug use to dull the pain. His hopes of a return home are dashed when his mother, now pregnant, dies from another overdose.

ECHOES OF THE RAGGED TROUSERED PHILANTHROPISTS
Demon has many other adventures and encounters as he fights his way to adulthood. The story is also about the grim realities of rural, post-industrial America. The Appalachian Mountain region was once a great coal mining area which fuelled the factories of the north. The book describes how the mining companies suppressed the development of other industries to ensure a plentiful labour force with no competition, and then kept the schools poorly resourced to stifle ambition in the young people other than to work in a mine. Nevertheless, the people look back to this era as the 'good times' when they had work and money, although a voucher system meant they often had to spend their wages in the company shop – echoes of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* there.

The 1980s brought modernisation to the mining industry that meant they no longer needed legions of workers to toil underground, they blew the tops off the mountains and employed a few giant machines to scrape up the coal. Mass redundancies and unemployment meant depression and poverty and the area became the butt of jokes and scorn about 'hillbillies' and 'rednecks' as it remains today. In the wake of despair came the drugs epidemic, both illegal, and legal in the form of Oxycotin. The book examines these themes through the lives of the characters. Aunt June Peggot is a

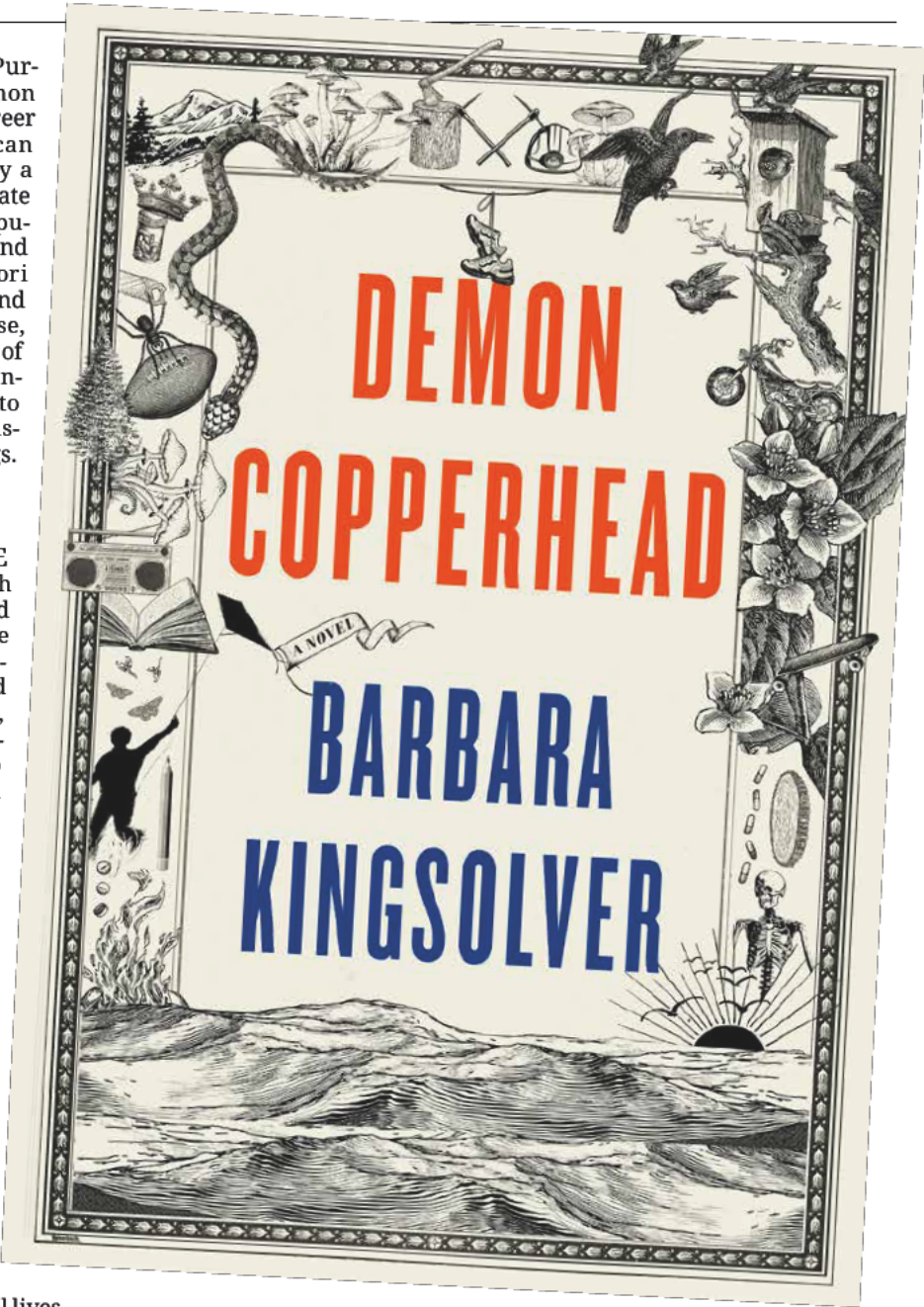
nurse who dates a sleazy Purdue drug salesman. Demon himself, his promising career as an Highschool American Football star cut short by a knee injury, is led into opiate addiction by an unscrupulous team doctor. Demon and his ethereal girlfriend Dori descend into the squalor and desperation of drug abuse, painting a moving picture of his attempts to get clean undermined by his desire to save her from pain and distress by scoring more drugs.

ITS MESSAGE IS ONE OF RESILIENCE SURVIVAL AND HOPE
This is a big novel with many other characters and events that explore the themes of social deprivation: the exploitation and manipulation of the poor, the prejudice and stereotyping that they have to suffer in both the media and society at large. Yet its message is one of resilience, survival, and hope. We meet Mr Ghali, for example, an Indian shop keeper who gets a thrill from handing his customers their take-aways. He was born into the Dalit (untouchable) caste in his home country and physical contact of this type was never allowed. There is Mr Armstrong, an inspirational Black teacher and his White wife, who have had to face down ignorance and discrimination in their working and personal lives.

There is the tragic and moving story of Marisa Peggot who endures unbearable mental and physical torture by her partner as a young mother and ends up in prison for wounding him with a knife but is eventually released and reunited with her son: both damaged individuals groping towards a better life. Demon is able to use his skill at drawing cartoons to create a hill-billy superhero character in a local newspaper to counter the negative stereotypes of rural people as feckless, inbred wasters and to illustrate

the real challenges that they face. The book ends with Demon aged 18, and finally free of drugs, finding a tentative new love and making his third attempt to head east and

see the ocean for the first time in his life. I would strongly recommend this book as a brilliant and illuminating read.



CROSSWORD CORNER

Across

1. Note on rage causes jeopardy (6)
3. Serf in a mix-up for reasons (6)
4. Flowers in plush arrangement without hydrogen (6)

Down

1. Same note on mixed foreigner indicates refusal (6)
2. Severely criticises Sunday dinners (6)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 5 of The HIP List

1					2
3					
4					

POETRY CORNER

GREEK ARMS
OFELIA FERCH RHOS

So carry me out, Greek arms,
to linens, soft and Aegean.
Clay meets dust
dust meets fertile soil.

Glory, glory, Greek arms,
do not drop me-
Discard me as if
the ocean would give up her dead,

as if your swift footfall
could outrun a tide.
As if, kicking and screaming,
your swift footfall can still bear me stiffly up.

Don't drop me, Greek arms.
Wield me. Pick me up.
Rattle me like a sabre-
I died that you may kill again.

FOOTBALL

Crunch Time for the ‘U’s

1 February: Hastings Utd 0, Lewes 1
4 February: Horsham 1, Hastings Utd 0
8 February: Cheshunt 2, Hastings Utd 1

HUGH SULLIVAN

Hastings United suffered three more Isthmian League defeats in the first eight days of February – that’s seven consecutive league and cup losses in 2025. Six of them have been by the margin of a single goal, and not all of them were deserved on the overall run of play. But the fact is that the ‘U’s have managed to score only five goals in this period. Manager Danny Searle has had success in stemming the haemorrhage of goals at the wrong end, but at the expense, it appears, of hobbling what was already a limited attacking force.

Against Lewes on 1 February, the



Davide Rodari on the ball for Hastings against Lewes

‘U’s had more of the ball and were generally on the front foot – just couldn’t apply a finishing touch, and conceded a penalty 16 minutes from time. Keeper Louis Rogers saved it, but couldn’t stop the rebound. As Searle pointed out afterwards, the visitors had no other shots on target throughout the match, but that was enough.

Away at Horsham, who are third in the league table, Hastings had to defend for long periods, but Searle said his lads had “stuck to the game plan...We had a real go at them and caused them some problems”. The only goal was conceded in the 70th minute.

Making the long journey to Cheshunt in Hertfordshire last Saturday, the ‘U’s scored in the 12th minute when Davide Rodari head-

ed in from a Kian Moynes cross – the first league goal scored by the ‘U’s in open play since the beginning of January. They remained good value for their 1-0 halftime lead, but were pegged back to 1-1 just after the hour mark and then succumbed to a sucker punch two minutes into added time.

To make matters worse, Dulwich Hamlet, the team in 18th position which Hastings will need to overhaul if they are to escape relegation, won 3-0 on the same afternoon against Bowers & Pitsea. That widened the gap between them to nine points.

It’s by no means unbridgeable with 14 matches still to play. But now is crunch time. Hastings were due to play a home fixture against Canvey Island on Tuesday of this

week (after this column went to press), then host Dulwich themselves at the Pilot Field tomorrow (Saturday) and play a third successive match at home against Wingate

& Finchley the following Saturday. All three visiting teams are in the bottom half of the league table. United’s task is clear: they have to start scoring – and winning.

ISTHMIAN PREMIER LEAGUE STANDINGS AS AT 10 FEBRUARY (BOTTOM SIX)

		P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
17	Whitehawk	29	9	6	14	33	51	-18	33
18	Dulwich Hamlet	29	9	5	15	45	56	-11	32
19	Hendon	28	7	7	14	38	47	-9	28
20	Hastings Utd	28	6	5	17	27	55	-28	23
21	Bowers & Pitsea	30	5	4	21	27	56	-29	19
22	Bognor Regis	30	4	6	20	35	76	-41	18

FOOTBALL

Cup Defeats Leave United Women in League Struggle

JON SMALLDON

Last week saw Hastings United Women exit their final two cup competitions of the season, leaving them to concentrate on the league. However, in that league, they sit one place above relegation with just one win – achieved almost six months ago – from their nine league games. If it’s always darkest before the dawn, then the ‘U’s must be in for a very bright sunrise indeed.

The team’s fourth season at Tier 6 level in the London & Southeast Regional League Division One South started with optimism. Under new manager, Jason Tibble, there was a return of some former players, a seemingly solid core of retained existing players, and a nice flow of youngsters developed in the Acade-

my programmes joining the senior squad. After a positive pre-season on the field, Hastings won their first game, beating the Soccer Elite Football Academy (SEFA) 3-0 away on 18 August.

However, with continual player turnover, and poor weather causing lengthy gaps between matches, the ‘U’s have found it difficult to sustain performance levels, and the season has mostly been one of frustration. Their eight completed league games since August have resulted in three draws and five losses. Most of those losses have been close – only one by more than a goal – and, with only one team to be relegated at the season’s end, they are clearly better placed than bottom-of-the table Three Bridges.

The Cup games last week followed a familiar pattern. In the League Trophy, at home to SEFA,

they were on top for long periods, especially early on, but could not find the net. They eventually lost 2-0 in extra time. Then, midweek, in the Eastbourne Chairman’s Cup, away to higher-ranked Newhaven, they made another good start but failed to score, and were eventually left chasing the game in a 3-1 loss.

There are, nevertheless, reasons to be cheerful. Even with long term absences to key players such as Rebecca Relf and Tiana Tapp, there’s been the return of captain Lauren Skinner-Swain, regular appearances by veterans Victoria Phillips and Rosie Muggeridge, and the advent of exciting younger talents such as Freya Hollister and Jess Wright. Hastings certainly have a more than fighting chance of both staying up this year and kicking on next season.

Hastings were due to play away at Aylesford last Sunday and at Bognor Regis on 16 February before their return to the Pilot Field on the 23rd.

Kick off is at 2pm and admission is free. Keep your eye on social media for any fixture updates – and do come along and show your support.

Further Women’s Football News: Westfield FC have announced plans for a women’s football team to begin playing next season. Further details, including trial dates, will be announced shortly.



United Women Team Huddle at the Pilot Field

CHILDRENS SPORT

HALF TERM ACTION

Active Hastings are offering a range of sports sessions through half term week from Tuesday 18 to Friday 21 February.

- Hollington Youth Hub will offer inclusive multi-sports on Tuesday and street dance on Wednesday
- Summerfields Leisure Centre will host volleyball on Tuesday
- The Play Sport Fitness Hub at the Firs on Elphinstone Road

will be open on Thursday for under 5s stay and play

- St Leonards Academy will host youth table-tennis on Friday
- Helenswood Sports Centre is the venue for ‘WildCats’ girls football on Friday.

Sessions should be booked in advance with tickets priced at £3, £2 or in some cases free. Visit hastings.gov.uk/sport_play/getactive/holiday-activities/ for further info.



WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR PEOPLE'S CHOICE

A locally taken picture has won the People's Choice prize at the Natural History Museum's Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition 2024.

Ian Wood's image shows a Eurasian badger appearing to glance up at graffiti on a quiet road in St Leonards. Residents had been leaving food scraps on the pavement for foxes and Ian noticed that badgers from a nearby sett were coming to forage. After seeing a badger ambling along the pavement by this wall late one night, illuminated by light from a lamppost, he decided to photograph it and set up a small hide on the edge of the road.

According to the Natural History Museum—where the exhibition

remains until June 29th—the photograph beat 24 other shortlisted images. Museum director, Dr Douglas Gurr said: "Ian's flawlessly timed image offers a unique glimpse of nature's interaction with the human world, underscoring the importance of understanding urban wildlife."

Ian Wood adds: "There is a darker side to this image... The badger cull – which is still ongoing – has decimated their numbers and I fear that unless the cull is stopped, we'll only see badgers in urban settings in several parts of England. My hope is for this image to raise awareness of the damaging effect of the badger cull and help push for change."