

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



**HASTINGS
MUSICAL
FESTIVAL**

Festival Highlights Inside!

**Living
History**



**Prepare
to be Wowed**



DEMOLITION JOB

Hollington tower blocks to be bulldozed, residents relocated

HUGH SULLIVAN

Southern Housing, the largest provider of social housing in Hastings, last week announced plans to demolish four tower blocks on Stonehouse Drive, Hollington in which over 400 households currently reside.

Southern's intention is to replace the blocks with new-build, low-rise social housing by the time that construction is concluded five or more years from now, the site is expected to accommodate a greater number of homes overall.

The high-rise buildings – Bevin Court, Roosevelt Court, Kennedy Court and Churchill Court, known collectively as the Four Courts – were erected in the 1960s. Two of the four blocks, Bevin and Roosevelt, are dedicated to housing over-65s and/or disabled residents, many of whom have severe mobility problems.

In the words of Southern's own press release, the buildings "no longer reflect the standards of modern living and don't meet today's design and accessibility requirements".

A spokesperson added that, even with significant investment, it would not be practicable to adapt the existing buildings to provide satisfactory future facilities: "For example, essential upgrades such as lifts that stop on all floors – as they currently don't – and are large enough to enable ambulance crews to exit residents are not feasible within the current buildings."

"The render at Bevin Court has detached, and attaching new cladding, given the construction methodology from the 1960s, presents significant challenges. Each block has only one staircase, which impacts accessibility and mobility. In short, the design and layout of flats don't meet modern



HUGH SULLIVAN



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EDITOR'S NOTE

As HIP leaves behind its 10th anniversary, we continue to provide true community journalism. Here's to the next 10 years!

Our headline story covers the demolition of the 60-year-old Four Courts social housing development; an opportunity to reshape social housing for the needs of the future as well as contribute to the overall wellbeing of Hollington.

Southern Housing's planned development appears well considered. HIP will be following whether warm words translate into appropriate action to match the aspirations of Hastings BC's corporate plan for Hastings (p2), A vision "where residents are proud of their town and feel safe valued and heard."

Something making us proud every year is Fat Tuesday, returning this year in all its glory (p6) Read the HIP List and the Arts section to discover the huge array of events, festivals and community activities available. And with World Book Day almost here (p6) let's celebrate access to books in the town: the many bookshops and our three libraries, including the wonderful flagship Hastings Library.

Anyone for reclaiming the future? See the Bookbuster review of the book of the same name (p13).

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News



HUGH SULLIVAN

1 mobility standards, and the physical constraints of the buildings restrict the opportunities to modernise these blocks to the standards residents expect.”

Southern has made it clear that all residents will be offered re-housing, either within the replacement estate as it comes into being or elsewhere. A spokesperson said that the housing provider is “committed to supporting every Four Courts Resident into a new suitable home, close to their support network”.

The proposed timetable involves all residents of Bevin Court moving out by March 2026, those of Roosevelt Court by March 2027, and those of Kennedy Court and Churchill Court following on.

SHOCK ANNOUNCEMENT

The announcement came, however, as a shock to many of the Four Courts residents, who were unaware that Southern had any such plans afoot.

They heard of the intended demolitions for the first time last week when housing officers knocked on individual doors and invited them to attend presentations in the respective ground-floor lounges of Bevin Court and Roosevelt Court and in the local community centre.

Residents who have lived there for upwards of 20 years were understandably upset at the prospect of wholesale removals, even though Southern have said that every household will be assigned a dedicated Resettlement Officer “who will work with them and support them through the moving process”. All residents will receive a one-off home loss payment, and the normal costs associated with moving home, including removals, would be covered.

“I don’t like it but I understand it,” said one resident of Roosevelt Court who has terminal cancer and a severely disabled wife.

Other residents seemed similarly

resigned to the move, though several said on enquiry that they were personally quite content with existing conditions within their block. There was a general consensus that relocation to Bexhill (particularly to existing Southern estates on the seaford) or to Battle would be more acceptable than remaining in St Leonards or Hastings.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

The housing department of Hastings Borough Council has clearly been in the know about Southern’s plans for some time, and is supportive. A council spokesperson said: “We have had several conversations with Southern Housing about their plans to improve the housing at Four Courts. We know that moving will be unsettling for some residents who have lived in their homes for many years, but there is a dedicated resettlement team and a clear plan in place to support them and their families through the change and ensure everyone who wants to can be rehoused locally.

“The redevelopment of the site will provide more affordable social housing with a mix of house types that are environmentally sustainable and that meet current mobility standards.”

Local councillors John Cannan (Wishing Tree ward) and Paul Barnett (Hollington ward), both mem-

bers of the Hastings (ex-Labour) Independents Group, have also welcomed Southern’s redevelopment scheme.

Cllr Cannan said: “Having campaigned since being elected in Wishing Tree to get Southern Housing to properly address the significant number of problems at the Four Courts, I welcome the news that they are finally planning to regenerate the area and provide modern and safe homes for all their residents.” He was concerned, however, that the process of moving residents should be done “sensitively, acknowledging that...these are people’s homes, where people have brought up families and memories have been made.”

Three Labour councillors, Helen Kay, Danuta Kean and Phil Scott, have met with Southern executives since the announcement. Cllr Kean reported on Facebook that they asked at the meeting how the Four Courts residents could be rehoused in the face of the current shortage of housing in the area. They were told that the real logjam is in family homes, single and small households, the majority in the Four Courts, will be moved first.

Southern has been asked to recognise the recently established independent tenants’ association HASHTA (Hastings Area Southern Housing Tenants Association) as representing the residents.

SITE NOTICE FOR APPLICATION FOR A PREMISES LICENCE

This notice is to advise that on **19th day of February 2025** an application for a Premises Licence was made to Hastings Borough Council for the premises known as **Hastings Pier (The Middle Building), White Rock, Hastings, TN34 1UY**

Was made by: **Sheikh Abid Gulzar** For the following licensable activities or proposed variation

Regulated Entertainment: Plays, Films, Live Music, Recorded Music, Performance of Dance, Anything of a similar description to

that falling within e, f or g (Outdoors) 08.00 to 00:00 Monday to Sunday, New Years Eve until 02:00
Late Night Refreshment 23:00 to 00:00 Monday to Sunday, Until 02:00 New Years Eve, Occasions pier open or event in progress 23.00 – 05.00
Sale of Alcohol by Retail (on and off the premises) 08:00 to 00:00 Monday to Sunday, Until 01:30 New Years Eve

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

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

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

Dated this **19th** day of **February 2025**

SITE NOTICE FOR APPLICATION FOR A PREMISES LICENCE

This notice is to advise that on **19th day of February 2025** an application for a Premises Licence was made to Hastings Borough Council for the premises known as **Hastings Pier (Event Space and Deck), White Rock, Hastings, TN34 1UY**

Was made by: **Sheikh Abid Gulzar** For the following licensable activities or proposed variation

Regulated Entertainment: Plays, Films, Live Music, Recorded Music, Performance of Dance, Anything of a similar description to

that falling within e, f or g (Outdoors) 08.00 to 00:00 Monday to Sunday, New Years Eve until 02:00
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Dated this **19th** day of **February 2025**

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



Council Tax set to increase again

PAUL McLAUGHLIN

Most local council taxpayers will see bills increase in April by over £100 after East Sussex County Councillors and Hastings Borough Councillors agreed their respective budget plans for 2025-26 at respective full council meetings in Lewes and Hastings.

The East Sussex CC share of the tax will rise by 4.99%, with a 2.99% increase in the Hastings BC portion. As a result, residents living in an average Band D home will pay £2,551 in the coming year—£114 more than last year. The new council tax bills will be sent out in early March.

East Sussex CC receives over 73% of the council tax revenue to fund county-wide services, including schools, social care, roads, and libraries. Hastings BC is allocated just over 12% of the money to spend on

local services, such as providing temporary accommodation, environmental health, combatting fly tipping and initiatives to promote the town. The remainder of the tax is allocated to Sussex Police, which receives 10%, and East Sussex Fire Authority, which gets 4%.

The Leader of East Sussex, Keith Glazier, defended the tax increase saying the County Council had had to make significant savings to adult social care services and to use £11.4m of its limited reserves to set a balanced budget.

Cllr Glazier said East Sussex had seen “huge increases in statutory, demand-led services for vulnerable children and adults”, and the costs of maintaining these core services, which account for around three-quarters of the Council’s total budget, have increased significantly in recent years.” Without a “significant and permanent increase in funding”, he said, the Council “will have to consider more extreme op-

tions next year and beyond, including seeking Exceptional Financial Support from Government.”

The fiscal uncertainty in Hastings BC is equally bleak. Cllr Darren Mackenzie of the Green Party, the lead councillor for finance, said there was a net deficit of £29,000 in the Council’s finances this year compared with last year’s net deficit of £1.6m.

Cllr Mackenzie said the Council will have to draw down from its reserves to cover the shortfall. He warned that, without a more generous central government funding settlement in future years, Hastings BC would use up its current £5.6m in reserves within just three years.

This has been an exceptionally challenging spending round for both East Sussex CC and Hastings BC. There is no disputing the fact that both councils are facing very difficult budgetary decisions, given the serious reductions in funding over many years. The planned reorganisation of local government structures in Sussex over the next two years offers the hope of making some savings from promised efficiencies but, without a new funding regime, the threat of effective bankruptcy hanging over councils across the country will remain.

New Corporate Plan For Hastings

PAUL McLAUGHLIN

The Green-led Hasting Borough Council has agreed a new Corporate Plan for 2025-2030 setting out a vision for Hastings “where residents are proud of their town and feel safe, valued and heard. Where housing is available, affordable, energy-efficient and secure. Where everyone can live healthy, fulfilling lives, no matter who they are or where they’ve come from, and where people can access the right skills and education they need to get well-paid jobs.”

Cllr Julia Hilton, the Leader of the Council, said the new Corporate Plan identified five key priorities to tackle over the coming years. Underpinning them all was the need to ensure a financially stable council. Without financial stability, she said the Council would not be able to invest in the areas that need money spending on them and would not be in a position to deliver high quality, responsive services in cooperation with local people.

Tackling homelessness and ensuring good-quality housing is a key area identified by the Council Leader. With the temporary accommodation budget currently taking up 40% of the Council’s total spending, Cllr Hilton said the biggest chal-

lenge facing the town was to reduce the numbers of homeless people and to improve the quality of the housing stock. The plan will focus on increasing housing supply, particularly social rented homes and housing co-ops, and developing potential sites and bringing empty homes back into use where feasible. The goal is to ensure that all “residents have access to secure, warm, energy-efficient homes and to reduce temporary accommodation numbers to low double digits.”

The third key priority is the “ambition to tackle poverty and inequality” and to “strive for equity across the borough working with and celebrating the diverse communities” in the town. Alongside this is a renewed commitment to taking action to tackle the climate and nature crisis.

Cllr Hilton said the final key priority was the Pride in Place initiative to encourage and support pride in the town with the ambition that local people “would see a noticeable difference in places like the sea front promenade and bus stop improvements.

With devolution and local government reorganisation expected within the next few years, Cllr Hilton was challenged as to why the Council had put together the new Corporate Plan. She said it was “essential that our priorities for the town, set out in our

new Corporate Plan, drive the process of devolution and local government reorganisation to ensure we get the best deal for Hastings. This means regeneration that addresses the long-standing inequalities in our town as well as building on the huge wealth of cultural, heritage and creative assets to deliver renewal and ensure Hastings’ place as a top tourist destination.”

Labour’s Helen Kay said she was disappointed with the plan. She argued that it was just a series of worthy statements designed to satisfy Green supporters and did not contain a detailed programme for growth or renewal.

Paul Barnett, the Leader of the Hastings Independents group, welcomed the plan “in a spirit of cooperation with other parties.” He gave credit to the Green-led administration for building on the stability that he and his colleagues had started when they ran the Council as Labour members, and for committing up to £10m for buying new homes to house the town’s homeless. He also welcomed the commitment to tackle poverty and the need to address child poverty, in particular.

Marlow Eastwood for the Conservatives welcomed the positive aspirations of the plan but expressed her concerns at the lack of detail about growth and any plans for a serious tourism offer. She said she was also concerned at the impact of new housing and feared that green spaces, such as Sandrock Hall Bends, would be lost across the town.

The new Corporate Plan was adopted by the council with 17 votes in favour, 7 against and two abstaining.

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Graham Peters (Town Deal Board), Cllr Julia Hilton and Troika partners on West Hill

Consultation over Castle and Café Project

HUGH SULLIVAN

Plans for the development of a £3m plus ‘interpretation centre’ and café/restaurant at Hastings Castle will be presented to local residents at West Hill Community Centre

next Thursday (6 March). A further ‘drop-in’ session will be held for the general public at the Stade Hall on Hastings seafront on Saturday 22 March. The funds are being provided as part of the ‘levelling up’ Town Deal under which a total of over £24m was allocated to Hastings in July

2021. The following year, the Town Deal board hit upon development of new infrastructure around the castle as its “flagship, signature project”, though the form it would take has only slowly emerged. Last August, following competitive bids, a local design consortium, Troika Projects, was selected as project partner with Hastings BC. Their remit is to turn the derelict West Hill Café into a high-class restaurant plus café, to provide a new “interpretation visitor centre to retell the story of Hastings Castle”, and to install a platform lift that will provide step-free access from the existing West Hill Lift “to all spaces”. Adjustments to an earlier version of the project were approved by MH-

CLG (the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) last September, including the approval of Troika as project partner and extension of the time for delivery of the project up to March 2027. In November, the Town Deal Board were told that due diligence checks had been completed and that a Grant Funding Agreement would be drawn up. It seems to have taken a further three months for this to be completed and signed, following a process described last week by a spokesperson for Hastings BC as “both parties having been through standard legal protocol”. The spokesperson added that “a revised timescale is being worked out and will be shared soon” – perhaps at the next Town Deal Board meeting on 11 March, when Troika are scheduled to present their next project update. It was previously anticipated that the building would take 18 months.

Graham Peters, chair of the Town Deal Board, said last week; “I’m looking forward to seeing Troika’s exciting plans and vision develop into a reality, elevating the castle and café space into a leading destination for the town.” Leader of Hastings BC, Julia Hilton, said: “I’m looking forward to seeing their vision and plans presented at the initial public engagement events. The involvement of residents and visitors is key to this project, and commitment to collaboration in the planning process is something we all agree on.”

The drop-in session at the West Hill Community Centre will be between 6.30 and 8.30pm on 6 March; at the Stade between 12 noon and 4pm on 22 March.



White Rock Hotel to be Sold

The family owners of the 51-bed-room White Rock Hotel in Hastings, Laurence Bell, his wife Catherine Parr plus Catherine’s sister Vicky Parr, have announced that it is being put on the market for sale. International property agents Colliers have been instructed at a guide price of £3.5 million pounds. Laurence and the Parrs have managed the hotel for over 20 years, developing it as not only a prime seafront destination for tourists but as a hub for locals, with a well-attended ground floor bar and restaurant and a basement meeting room for local arts and community events. In their prospectus Colliers quote Laurence: “Buying the hotel was the best business decision we’ve ever made, but we think it’s getting time for us to move on and let a new owner build on the success we’ve had.”

Residents’ Objections Fail to Block Waste Booking System

East Sussex County Council is to introduce a booking system at all 10 of the county’s household waste and recycling centres. Cllr Claire Dowling, lead member for Transport and Environment, made this decision on Monday this week at a meeting at County Hall, Lewes, after reviewing a report by Rupert Clubb, Director of Communities, Economy and Transport. A council spokesperson said that the system is expected to be up and running some time before the end of the next financial year. Mr Clubb’s report made quite explicit the aims of the booking

scheme to resolve problems of congestion and queuing at some of the 10 recycling sites at certain times of the week and year; to improve the operation and safety of the sites; • To save money (estimated at £50,000 per year); • To ensure that only East Sussex residents are given access. Operational benefits, experienced (it was claimed) by neighbouring councils that have implemented booking systems, will include • deterrence of commercial traders; • customers bringing their waste

in bulk and visiting less often; • managing growth of demand more efficiently. The council sought advance feedback on the proposed scheme by putting it out for consultation over a nine-week period between mid-October and Christmas. It received almost 6,000 responses – the highest ever recorded by this council department. Of these over 90% were negative (more than 72% “extremely negative”); only 4% were in favour. Many respondents asked whether a partial booking system could be considered e.g. at weekends or other busy times, or at certain sites only. But this was ruled out by council officers on grounds of inconsistency for operators of the sites and confusion for customers. Lewes Liberal Democrats subsequently presented a petition opposing the scheme which attracted over 3,000 signatures. None of this opposition impressed Mr Clubb, who recommended that the council should proceed to set up the booking system. Cllr Dowling agreed, taking into account the financial savings as well the potential benefits identified in the report.

Ark Schools Challenge Behaviour Claims

In HIP 270 we published an article, *Why Won’t They Behave?*, reporting on disciplinary issues at Ark Alexandra Academy. It referred to complaints made in social media posts that a member of staff had ‘screamed’ in the face of a pupil. This part of the article was not put to Ark Schools before publication. We accept that it should have been. We now understand that the social media posts to which the article referred related to an allegation made in school, which was independently investigated by the local authority and found to be unsubstantiated. At the time, the school wrote to parents and shared the outcome of the investigation which stated that the allegations were ‘unfounded... with no foundation or basis in fact.’

We are sorry for the distress caused to the individual by this false allegation having been repeated, and acknowledge that what was written about this person was inaccurate. We also reported that suspensions were being triggered by school rules and etiquette. Ark Schools have told us that the number of suspensions have “significantly reduced this year” and that there have been “no permanent exclusions this academic year.” In this respect we regret that our article misreported MP Helena Doolimore in referring on Facebook to 123 children as having been “excluded” from the Academy last term. What she stated was that 123 children were “removed”, i.e. taken out by their own parents or others in authority.

Bring Eurostar Services Back to Ashford!

Hastings & Rye MP Helena Dollimore has joined a group of fellow-Labour South East region MPs campaigning to restore railway services to Europe from Ashford International station. Earlier this month she met the Rail Minister Baron Hendy for this purpose, and says that he told her he was working hard to make it happen.

Until 2020, Eurostar services between Paris and London called several times each day at the Kent station, which had huge public investment in previous decades to allow it to process international travellers and thereby generate increased passenger use through Kent and Sussex. Then a combination of Brexit and the Covid pandemic caused the Eurostar company to



suspend stopping services both to Ashford and to Ebbsfleet on economic grounds, and it has shown no inclination to resume them.

There are, however, other train operators, including Sir Richard Branson's Virgin and Evolyn, an international consortium of Spanish origin, who are showing an interest in competing along the route. The Department for Transport has stated that it would support

No Housing on High Weald Site

A planning inspector has upheld a decision of Rother District Council to refuse permission to build housing on the site of a former plant nursery at Whatlington which is adjacent to listed farm buildings.

Developers Steed Construction Limited applied last year to build five new homes in place of the array of dilapidated glasshouses alongside Dorrells farm just off the A21. They argued in their appeal against Rother's refusal that, in their current state, the glasshouses "cause significant harm to the beauty of the rural landscape", which is within the designated High Weald Natural Landscape (HWNL) area.

The inspector ruled earlier this month that the clearance of the structures might be a visual improvement, "but the proposal would introduce housing and residential paraphernalia into the countryside. It would be an unwelcome urban incursion, eroding the characteristics of the surrounding landscape



WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

#Letter

'SO-CALLED VICTORY'

Dear HIP,

Re your article about Southern Water, and the so-called victory of receiving a bit of compensation:

No, of course Southern Water hasn't "rebuilt trust" with its 'customers'. Firstly, we are not customers. Since our government has abandoned Labour's former policy of taking water back into public ownership, we are forced to use companies like Southern Water. It's not a customer choice.

Secondly, you say that households will receive £50 for every 12 hours without water and that some will receive "up to £250", but those of us living near the town centre were without water for five days. I make that £500 we are owed.

I think it's also important to make the point that Southern Water have been citing 'maintenance'

and 'environmental' and 'infrastructure improvements' as their excuse for rising bills for years, whilst handing vast amounts of our money to bosses and shareholders, so I don't think they should get away with claiming the extortionate rises of the next few years are for that work as well. They have already been paid to do it.

Kay Green

#Letter

COAST VERSUS INLAND

Dear HIP

It has long been a complete nonsense for Hastings to be wrapped around by Rother, so the move toward unitary authorities makes sense on that basis alone. However, this new arrangement must be intended to be long term, so the idea of some sort of coastal community authority is just asking for problems, including a clash with who-

ever runs the inland areas. This is because large areas of the coastal strip will, over the next two or three generations, be hit by extensive flooding, and movement along the coast east to west will become very limited; no rail line and no A259. When hundreds of existing homes and businesses etc are flooded and can no longer obtain insurance cover – and that is happening already – development within existing rural areas will be unavoidable.

Ken Davis

#From our website

WEST MARINA

Given that the water companies cannot cope with this town's sewage now, how on earth are they going to cope with more builds added? Surely it would be better if Southern Water sorted it all out before any decisions are made of what and where.

S Moore

21 September 2024 – 16 March 2025

IMMORTAL APPLES, ETERNAL EGGS

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Abigail Norris, *The Faellen Aepfel*, 2023.
Image courtesy of The Ingram Collection © Abigail Norris

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

letters@hastingsindependentpress.co.uk
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PHOTOS: FAT TUESDAY

funding so that we can deliver something that's really substantial, but also really good quality."

Last year, a lack of funding required changes, however as a small organisation they were able to be flexible and still managed to offer "the core element that people love". This year, the organisers feel "very lucky" to be supported by Arts Council England.

For the organisers, the focus is on giving back to the community and showcasing the incredible artists the area has to offer. They receive around 250 applications every year, and although they cannot say yes to everybody, they say it's "a great opportunity for us to really hear and see more of the local talent." Fat Tuesday highlights the "amazing musical economy" that exists in Hastings and introduces these artists to the public.

This year it will also feature an event at The White Rock Theatre, including comedy, cabaret, drag and bingo, with "something going on for everyone".

The two main music days are Saturday and Tuesday.

Unplugged Saturday features artists performing five 15-minute acoustic sets, moving between venues throughout town with little setup, which can often be very "chaotic".

The Fat Tuesday Tour involves artists playing three 20-minute sets in venues across Hastings Old Town. As the name suggests, Tuesday night is the main event, with full stages set up in all the venues that participate and a real focus on high energy local artists.

However, Lampitt confesses a real affection for the Saturday programme, saying "I absolutely love the madness of something like that. I love the fact that you can walk around and there are hundreds of people out on the streets. You know, musicians running from venue to venue. There's different genres of music being played across the old town and St. Leonards. I think that's just wonderful. The Saturday has always been my favourite bit."

Visit schedule.hastingsfattuesday.co.uk for a full list of this year's events and artist details.

Prepare to be Wowed: Fat Tuesday is Back

ERIN WARD

This year's Fat Tuesday festival is anticipated to be just as exceptional as ever.

From live performances and music conventions to the annual umbrella parade, the festival has something for everyone.

HIP spoke to Sally Lampitt, one of the event directors, for a behind-the-scenes snippet of what it takes to organise an event of this scale and a preview of what to expect from this year's festival.

Hastings Fat Tuesday runs from 28 February to 4 March, featuring over 350 free gigs, gatherings, parties and parades alongside ticketed events, with acclaimed artists from

across the South-East appearing alongside a wealth of local bands.

The event is run by a not-for-profit organisation that supports the communities of Hastings and St Leonards year-round, promoting creative opportunities to people at all stages of their lives through arts and culture. It is managed by a small team made up of co-directors Adam Daly & Sally Lampitt and General Manager Hannah Deeble, and it is currently the UK's largest Mardi Gras celebration.

The preparation for the festival is extensive, beginning only a few weeks after the previous event finishes. This is essential for the necessary preparations involving funding, marketing and partnerships to take place. According to Lampitt, the main challenge in recent years has been "being able to secure enough



Silent Vigil for Afghan Women's Rights

The Women's Rights Network (WRN) East Sussex is holding a silent vigil to stand in solidarity with Afghan women and girls living under the Taliban regime on Saturday 1 March at 11.00pm outside the former Debenhams on Robertson Street, Hastings. The event is open to everyone.

Speakers will voice the testimonies of Afghan women and stand in silent reflection remembering the

women and girls in Afghanistan.

The Hastings vigil is one of a series of actions being held across the UK, all of which seek to raise awareness of the discrimination faced by Afghan women and girls since the Taliban regime regained power in 2021. Restrictions include limiting access to education, employment and legal protections, and the suppression of a public presence and free speech.



For more information about ways to get involved, visit the WRN website womensrights.network For information about the Hastings vigil or about East Sussex WRN please contact event coordinators, Harriet Wilder and Sue Williams, at wrneastsussex@womensrights.network



World Book Day

World Book Day is an annual celebration of books and reading, which this year falls on 6 March.

It is the day when thousands of

school pupils will dress as their favourite book-based character and will receive a £1 book token to redeem for one of a series of special

books published on the day.

Here in Hastings, with five independent bookshops and a growing community of writers and illustrators living in the town, there's a chance for grown-ups to join in the fun too, as the teams behind the Hastings Book Festival and the Hastings Book Festival Fringe are putting on a bit of a party at Barnaby's Lounge in the town centre.

Dr Tola Dabiri, one of the organisers commented: "The evening will offer a chance to meet other writers, readers and book lovers, share details of what people are reading at the moment, find out more about this year's Book and Fringe Festivals, and maybe even sign up as a volunteer or a contributor. Whatever your interest, we'd love to meet you."

The World Book Day event happens 6 to 8pm on 6 March at Barnaby's Lounge, at 46 Robertson Street.

Human Cost of Universal Credit

FERDUSARA ALI

I had been actively looking for work but encountered an overwhelming number of barriers – pre-employment checks, background criminal record scrutiny and reference requests from the last six years of employment. This caused delays in starting my new job and, without any income, I was forced to apply for Universal Credit.

As a single person, I was only entitled to the bare minimum – £393.45. Based on my area’s assessment, I qualified for a housing benefit of £595.00. However, with my rent at £800, I had to use my personal allowance to cover the shortfall – leaving a grand total of £188.45 to cover all my food and bills for the month.

However, my situation worsened when I received a backdated payment from my former employer which consequently affected my

benefits. They deemed this as ‘income,’ which, of course, makes perfect sense in their world. But the significant reduction in my Universal Credit, left me unable to pay my rent and pushed me into arrears.

As I contested the issue over the phone with an advisor I remember burying my face in my hands as she – someone responsible for determining my financial fate – said she couldn’t help. How would I cover my rent or afford food for the month? The advisor suggested I seek financial help from friends or family – something I’d already exhausted. It was utterly exasperating. What happens when your loved ones are also facing financial difficulties, or worse, when you have no one to rely upon? This raises a crucial question: where do you turn for help when the system lets you down?

Always being self-sufficient and never needing benefits, I was shocked by the minimal support

available. It’s truly disheartening to witness our economy in such dire straits while the government allocates £4 million for weapons to Israel. I recognise the concern over benefit fraud, estimated to cost £9.7 billion in overpayments. However, the response from the Department for Work and Pensions has been to demand direct access to Universal Credit claimants to reclaim funds they may have mistakenly issued. Which fails to consider individual circumstances like mine, where a backdated payment was not fraudulent at all.

It might appear to be a proactive measure against fraud but felt more like an additional barrier for someone earnestly trying to find work. In recent years, Universal Credit has become a cornerstone of the UK’s welfare system, designed to support those in need. Yet for many legitimate claimants the system is riddled with obstacles. The very thing meant to provide help often leaves people feeling isolated, overwhelmed and even suicidal. A report from The Lancet estimated that welfare ‘reforms’ could be linked to around 1,000 additional suicides

in the UK between 2010 and 2015. Official figures from 2022 indicate that 1,154 individuals reported the system had pushed them to consider suicide, and more than two thousand said the system had led to suicidal thoughts.

The plight of older adults claiming Universal Credit is particularly alarming. In 2024, the Office for National Statistics highlighted that individuals over 55 faced severe challenges managing their finances, often withdrawing money from pension funds only to find it was effectively consumed by Universal Credit calculations. The stress of financial insecurity has tragically driven some to take their lives, while others have faced the dire choice between heating their homes and affording food. The heart-wrenching realities of hypothermia and starvation starkly illustrate the shortcomings of a system designed to assist those in need.

As a result of this systemic failure, countless individuals and families are navigating the treacherous waters of financial insecurity, revealing that the current welfare system is not just a safety net but rather a precarious tightrope that many are forced to traverse or, tragically, use to hang themselves.



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MOHAMMED IBRAHIM, UNSPLASH

Don't All Children's Lives Matter?

TERESA THORNHILL, a retired child protection lawyer, questions why we sell weapons to kill and maim children abroad

In February, I participated in a town centre rally organised by the Hastings and Rye Palestine Solidarity Campaign. It was in protest at the activities of General Dynamics, a company in our town which makes parts for weapons sold to the Israeli Defence Force. Many years ago, as a newly qualified barrister, I volunteered as a human rights researcher with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza – before choosing the specialism of child protection law. I have therefore followed the events of the last sixteen months closely.

As I stood beside a friend in the cold wind, I reflected on a curious and disturbing anomaly in our government's attitude towards children. All children in England or Wales, regardless of their nationality or immigration status, are, in theory at least, shielded from harm by our child protection system. We all know the system is fallible but, in principle, every child has the legal right to protection. Whatever we think of the failings of some local authorities in carrying out their

child protection duties, most of us agree that children have a right to safety which the law must protect.

But what about the rights of children outside the UK, whose very physical survival, in the case of Gaza, is threatened by our government's policy on arms sales? Israel killed at least 17,492 children between 8 October 2023 and 3 February 2025 (Gaza Government Information Office, [aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker)). UN reports over the last 18 years show that no other conflicts killed a higher number of children in one year ([oxfam.org/en/press-releases/more-women-and-children-killed-gaza-israeli-military-any-other-recent-conflict](https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/more-women-and-children-killed-gaza-israeli-military-any-other-recent-conflict)).

For the last 16 months, while Palestinian children in Gaza were being killed and maimed in horrifying numbers by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), UK governments refused to impose a full arms embargo on Israel. When a ban on just 8% of UK arms sales was imposed in September 2024, despite banning

the direct sale of parts for the F35 fighter jet to Israel, the government insisted on allowing their continuing sale into an international consortium. This in the full knowledge that those parts were likely to be sold on to the IDF. Crucially, the F35 has been used in some of the bombing raids which have killed women and children and left survivors with horrific injuries.

In 2024, the use of explosive weapons in Gaza condemned an average of 15 children a day, or 475 per month, to potentially lifelong disabilities, including severely injured limbs and hearing impairments ([savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/explosive-weapons-left-15-children-a-day-in-gaza-with-potential](https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/explosive-weapons-left-15-children-a-day-in-gaza-with-potential)). Many underwent amputations without anaesthetic since Israel's destruction of most of Gaza's healthcare infrastructure has meant that ade-

quate care and rehabilitation are not available. Some children, who should have been saved, bled to death or died subsequently due to the unavailability of health care. Other children who made it to a healthcare facility died there due to a lack of antibiotics and other vital medicines; their vulnerability was greatly increased by the serious malnutrition which has become widespread among Gaza's children and which has resulted from Israel's illegal policy of starvation of the population. The blocking of medical supplies by Israel is still causing child deaths, even six weeks after the ceasefire began.

That is the physical harm caused (partly) by the jets for which the UK continues to supply parts. What of the emotional harm, the trauma experienced by children who have witnessed the deaths of their mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers? On 1 Jan 2025 the BBC reported that an estimated 17,000 children have been left unaccompanied or separated from the family members who would normally care for them ([bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwyxewylpz9o](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwyxewylpz9o)); some are too young even to know their family's name. There is no treatment available to help these children deal with their trauma, which will have a devastating impact on their long-term mental health.

Neither is there help for the many Gazan women who have miscarried pregnancies as a result of malnutrition combined with acute war-induced stress. The miscarriage rate increased at least threefold in the first nine months of the war ([ippf.org/media-center/press-release-gaza-nine-months-pregnant-women-carry-burden-conflict](https://www.ippf.org/media-center/press-release-gaza-nine-months-pregnant-women-carry-burden-conflict)).

Having worked for thirty-something years as a child protection lawyer in the Family Court, I feel deeply ashamed of my country's insistence on a policy which has contributed to the acute suffering of Palestinian children. A legal challenge to the UK's refusal to ban the

sale of F35 fighter jet parts into the international consortium is due to be heard in the High Court in May, because it is not at all clear that the refusal is in line with the law (as set out in the Arms Trade Treaty 2013 Articles 6 and 7 and the UK's Strategic Export Licensing Criteria). Even if the government loses in court, it will be too late for the tens of thousands of Gazan children killed, injured, orphaned and traumatised by the British-assisted actions of the IDF.

I'm not making a point about the law. Rather, I'm asking, 'What kind of a country are we if, while seeking to protect our own children, we're willing to help inflict such horrific suffering on children living under military occupation in a foreign land?'

I've also often wondered during the last sixteen months whether anybody in government has stopped to consider the impact on our children and young people of witnessing the suffering of Gazan children on their smartphones. What does a ten- or twelve-year-old make of such images, especially given the lack of official condemnation of the perpetrators by people in power in the UK?

Time will tell what price the UK will have to pay for its complicity in genocide, in breach of its legal obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide of 1949. In the meantime, the very least our government can do is to fund the transfer of Gaza's badly wounded children to the UK for medical care and rehabilitation. To date, despite pressure from a group of 50 MPs and doctors keen to provide treatment, the government has not agreed to take a single injured Palestinian child ([bmj.com/content/388/bmj.r279](https://www.bmj.com/content/388/bmj.r279)).

*Teresa Thornhill's book **In Harm's Way: the Memoir of a Child Protection Lawyer**, is published in paperback by Harper Collins on 13.3.2025, price £10.99.*



Injured child, Gaza

© GIGI IBRAHIM

The Psychoshadowery of John Logie Baird

MARK WALTER

I met Jude Montague on a sunny but chilly January morning at the door of the Hastings Museum, and her beaming smile radiated from the entrance hall. I was there to talk to her about a new joint exhibition with her friend, artist Geraldine Swayne, inspired by the inventor of television, John Logie Baird. The show explores the light and the dark from the vision of Baird, and investigates the esoteric and historical landscape of Hastings and Sussex through paintings, moving pictures, and fine art prints.

Montague has a PhD in Film and Visual Media from the University of London. She is a well-known contributor to the local art scene, and owns a shop and studio in Kings Road, St Leonards with her partner and collaborator Matt Armstrong. She covers many artis-

tic bases including Fine Art prints and graphic novels. She is also a writer, composer and broadcaster. Swayne studied Fine Art at Newcastle University. She has made numerous experimental films including the world's first super-8-to-Imax film *East End*, produced by Cathy Shaw and narrated by Miriam Margolyes with music by Nick Cave. She lives and works in Hastings.

MAD JACK

This is the first joint project by these two artists. It follows a group exhibition that took place in May 2024 at Electro Studio Project Space entitled 'Spirit of Invention', which celebrated the hundredth anniversary of John Logie Baird's development of television in Hastings. While Montague is inspired by Baird's story, Swayne's subject is, in part, Montague herself. This is highlighted with three short films, created by Swayne, on Montague's

interest in, and 'obsession' with, John Logie Baird. One of the films features artist, writer and actor Julian Firth appearing alongside Montague on top of West Hill. Also highlighted are the follies of 'Mad Jack' Fuller, or (as he preferred to be remembered) Honest John Fuller (1757-1834), who was an anti-abolition slave-owner, yet like a number of these, considered a philanthropist in his time, being a patron of J. M. W. Turner and Michael Faraday. As an MP, and squire of Brightling, he also instigated the building of many follies. These included the unique conical Sugar Loaf Folly in Brightling on the Fuller Estates, financed by the sugar trade.

STOOKY BILL

Other exhibition highlights include *Stooky Bill*, a ventriloquist doll whose unmoving features helped Baird develop his 'televisor'. The lights were too bright for a human to sit underneath during the exper-

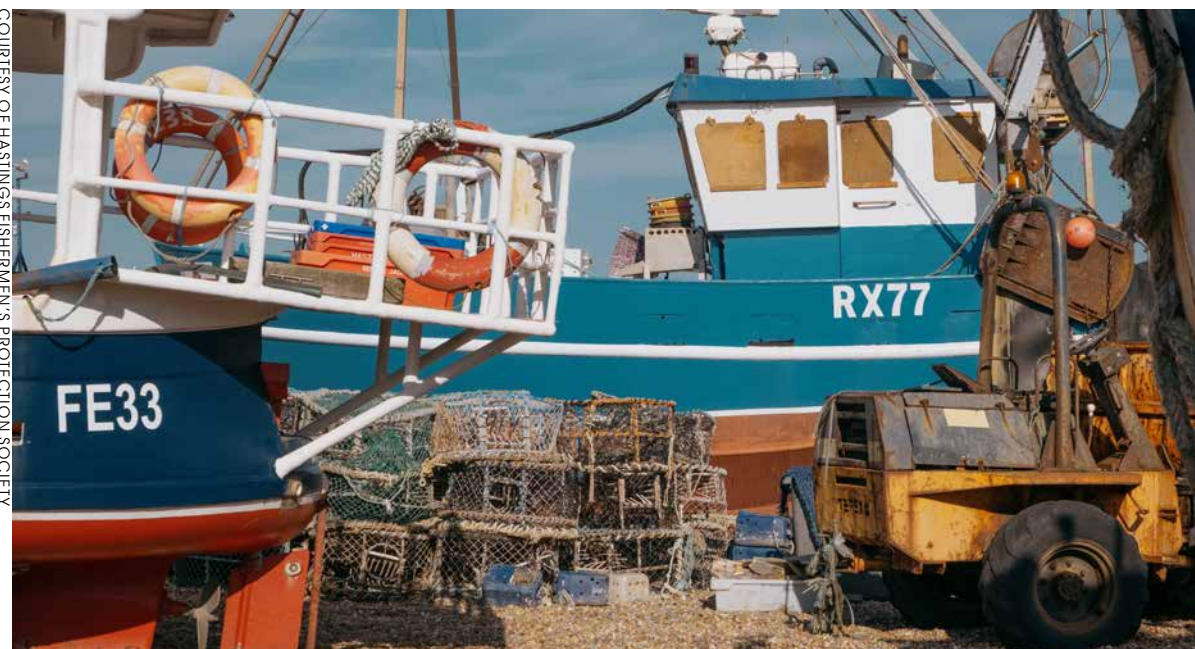


From a film by Geraldine Swayne, *Transmissions 1, 2, and 3*

imental stage and too hot to perfect the mechanism. Baird needed a still subject. Hence, the first transmitted human face was that of the puppet, recently reimagined by the *Doctor Who* writers as an evil, uncanny spirit. Baird would also have been proud that his colour field sequential technology was used to broadcast live television pictures from the moon during the Apollo 11 mission in 1969. This is highlighted in a

painting by Swayne, featuring Jude Montague in front of the moon.

Exhibition runs until 23 March at Hastings Museum & Art Gallery Tuesday-Saturday, 10 am-5 pm. Sundays, 11 am-4.30 pm. Free entry and Parking. 15 March 7-9.30 pm John Logie Baird – the proto-musical: closing event 23 March 4 pm-6 pm hmag.org.uk judecowanmontague.com geraldineswayne.org



COURTESY OF HASTINGS FISHERMEN'S PROTECTION SOCIETY

The Sun Feeds The Wind

A ground-breaking new partnership and exhibition that will collect and display the living histories of the fishing community of Hastings, Sussex for the first time will open in spring 2025 at Hastings Contemporary.

The project, which will preserve an intangible cultural heritage for future generations, has received a grant of £249,972 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and is part of a season of events that celebrate

the unique knowledge, skills and practices of the Hastings fishing fleet.

Paul Joy, Chairman of Hastings Fishermen's Protection Society, said: "Inshore fishing faces immediate and existential threats, but as fishermen we are eternally optimistic for a brighter future. As custodians of the sea, we connect our town to its history, with traditions which pre-date 1066, and to its future – offering answers to the chal-

lenges facing our oceans and coastal communities. We are excited to share our stories and preserve them for future generations."

Stuart McLeod, local regional Director at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: "We are delighted to support Hastings Contemporary with their project to capture and share the intangible cultural heritage of the Hastings fishing fleet. This grant, made possible by the National Lottery players, ensures that the voices and memories of this community can be heard for generations to come."

The Exhibition, The Sun Feeds The Wind, runs from 29 March to 14 September at Hastings Contemporary, Rock-a-Nore Road, TN34 3DW



Inspiring the Imagination

The award-winning theatre company, Spun Glass Theatre, is celebrating its first year as managers of Stade Hall Hastings. During that time, the building has welcomed over 10,000 people for theatre shows: Early Years workshops, parties, yoga sessions, art classes, folk music nights, cookery lessons, community events and much more.

To celebrate the anniversary, the company commissioned local artist Joseph Williams of Bamboology to create a Spun Glass Canopy for the hall. The structure brings shape to the space and inspires the imaginations of the audience in a kaleidoscope of technicolour.

Co-Creative Directors Ross Drury and Dan Hutton have also an-

nounced that Spun Glass Theatre will be creating and presenting a brand new theatre show this summer, *Pebble Road and the Pond People*.

The Arts Council-funded project takes inspiration from research into freshwater biodiversity in local ponds and rivers and will see the space transformed and theatricalised. The show is aimed at ages 5+, with an Early Years installation alongside: *A Pond Picnic*, inviting audiences aged 0-4 to explore and play in a freshwater paradise.

"We are delighted to continue bringing the magic of live performance to Stade Hall," say Ross and Dan, "making it an open and affordable theatre for everyone."

The musical power of genre-fluidity

VICTORIA KINGHAM

"I've heard it said before," began Max Baillie at Crown House, "that composing is slow improvisation, and improvisation is fast composing." A unique evening at Crown House followed. Five outstanding musicians in free fall, but showing the opposite of what you might imagine – complete command of the extended possibilities of their instruments.

One would have expected this evening to be trumpet-led: Byron Wallen is after all a jazz trumpeter of some celebrity who has been recording, touring, and teaching for 30 years. But though his trumpet lines were occasionally to the forefront (often very lyrical and spacious, reminiscent of mid-career Miles Davis) this was not the case: this was true collaboration. All five are notable musicians working across several genres. Together, because all of them are also boundary-resistant, they create something difficult to classify or to evaluate, since evaluation implies a comparison and by necessity there cannot be one.

There's been publicly performed freely improvised music on the jazz scene since the early 60s – it emerged as 'Free Jazz' in the States and most of the musicians who played it – An-

drew Hill, Ornette, Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Eric Dolphy *et al* were politically radical, serious, hyper-intelligent, and that movement coincided broadly with the civil rights movement. European and British audiences were receptive: saxophone players like Evan Parker (famed for his extended circular breathing) and the German trombone player Albert Mangelsdorff and guitarist David Bailey worked multiphonicly, extending the possibilities of their instruments in terms of the sheer variety of sounds produced.

Listening to the splendid players at Crown House feeding lines and riffs off each other is akin to what it must have been like for *Art aficionados* when they first saw abstract Art – what was it? Obviously not emotionally expressive portraits or sinuous animals, or the soulful despairing eyes of beautiful women or even exciting semi-industrial landscapes with trains. Quite suddenly, artists who had been painting vividly from life began to produce canvases that related only internally, asking, begging, for a whole different framework of appreciation. Even today, abstract art work is often described in terms of its resemblance to natural forms – pattern and harmony arise from nature – and the most popular Jackson Pollocks, for example are the ones that



Left to Right: Sacha Harlan, Byron Wallen, Ben Harlan

look more soothingly regular than the others, and much of his work has representative, concrete titles – *The New Yorker*, *Seasons*, *Sleeping Effort*. As humans we seem drawn to comparison with the world, natural or artificial, as we know it – what else is there, after all?

So having strayed a bit away, I'd say that similarly, the second session of this concert, because it was a little more rhythmic, less atonal, more familiar-sounding, was enjoyed by this audience without reserve whereas the first session had elicited some bewilderment (and a couple of departures). The quintet had, in their rehearsal that afternoon, collectively written two new compositions and these were incorporated into the sessions, perhaps both generating different patterns of collective improvised sound.

It is often said that any band is

only as good as its drummer. Award-winning drummer Sacha Harlan (nephew of the bass clarinetist, Ben Harlan) for someone so young seems already to be at the top of his game, with an exceptional, careful instrumental versatility and an extraordinary ear. This wasn't, of course, the normal lead/rhythm section line up at all, but at several points he turned the random sound patterns into something positive, driving, with an uplift. Cellist Danny Keane and violinist Max Baillie worked mightily well together, often providing a bowed rhythm reminiscent of the music of Steve Reich (with whom Baillie has been on tour). Keane at one point introduced a synth, and alternated acrobatically between that and his bowed or plucked cello, at another point, a lyrical phrase. Baillie produced occasional melodic lines in an expres-

sive minor, reminiscent of his Gypsy violin, Eastern European interests. Ben Harlan produced marvellous sweetness of sound from that rather unwieldy instrument, the bass clarinet, and an impressive exploration of its range. Wallen's trumpet sound is always mellow and he did at one stage elegantly insert the first line of the Confederate tune *Dixie* several times, in ascending keys, just for fun. Both Wallen and Harlan at one stage used their detached mouthpieces, delighting in the combined result.

Improv sessions are not unknown – there's a certain revival of free-form music at the moment, generated alongside the chaos of current global politics. But this was über-improv, made possible by the controlled, genre-fluid brilliance of all the players. "Welcoming of risk," hoped Baillie. Fast composing? Lightning speed.

Tell-Tale Fantasy

BECCA ROSE

A groundbreaking immersive VR experience, *The Tell-Tale Rooms*, comes to OBX at Hastings Commons in Hastings, from 13 to 18 March. The film and exhibition invite audiences to step into the extraordinary world of visually impaired, neurodivergent Hastings-based artist Eden Kötting.

Blending animation, archive footage, and live action, this 360° VR film takes viewers on a journey through Eden's imagination, revealing a world where art, memory, and dreams collide. At the heart of *The Tell-Tale Rooms* is a digital replica of a centuries-old farmhouse in the French Pyrenees, a home to Eden and her father, filmmaker Andrew



Still from *Diseased & Disorderly* by Andrew & Eden Kötting

Kötting, for over 30 years.

Inside this world, visitors walk among Eden's artwork and memories, guided by the artist herself. Eden was born with a rare genetic disorder, Joubert syndrome. Though profoundly disabled, here she becomes the mischief-maker and mas-

ter of ceremonies, offering a rare and uplifting insight into her life. The *Tell-Tale Rooms* is a celebration of creativity, resilience, and the boundless possibilities of virtual reality.

Andrew and Eden Kötting have been lifelong collaborators, father-daughter, a conjoined entity,

creating remarkable art from a remote Pyrenean farmhouse and a studio in St Leonards-on-Sea. The *Tell-Tale Rooms* marks an exciting new chapter in their work, now reaching galleries worldwide.

Eden Kötting was born in 1988. Growing up, she developed a passion

for drawing and painting. At a young age she appeared in the film *Gallivant* in 1996 alongside her great-grandmother. Eden continues to collaborate with her father on multimedia art projects, exhibitions, and performances. She is part of the Wednesday Mentoring Group at Project Art Works and shares a studio with Andrew in St Leonards-on-Sea.

Andrew Kötting trained at the Slade School of Art, specialising in performance and film. As Professor of Time-Based Media at UCA Canterbury, he has made over 100 short films and eight feature films, including *Gallivant*, *This Filthy Earth*, and *The Whalebone Box*. *The Tell-Tale Rooms* is his first VR project, created with Eden and TYKE Films.



Opening and Artist talk on Thursday 13th March, 6:30pm. VR film and exhibition free, open daily 4.00-7.00pm weekdays, 10.00-5.00pm weekends until 18 March. Further information: theobserverbuilding.org.uk/event/tell-tale-rooms

All About the Music: Becoming Led Zeppelin

EBM HUMPHREYS

When *Becoming Led Zeppelin* was released recently, it took little persuasion to get me to take a trip out of town. I was however armed with earplugs to get me through the inevitable twenty minutes of advertising, which an arthouse-lover like me should be spared. I was surprised by this film and it turns out I have something to learn from that.

It struck me as odd that (apart from some great photographs of the young-and-gorgeous Robert Plant leading a small pro-cannabis demo) debauched, drug-related stories were completely absent. I had to check when I got home: Were Led Zeppelin early exemplars of Straightedge subculture? Nope.

But it turns out co-directors Bernard MacMahon and Allison McGourty had their reason – exactly the reason my viewing companion observed – *because it’s about the music*. Personally I don’t mind debauchery and music. But never mind, because this is probably the best rockumentary you’ll ever see.

UTTERLY SPELLBINDING

And there are reasons for that too. Number one: footage of Led Zeppelin playing live in the late 60s and early 70s (which is the period this film covers) is notoriously rare. Their manager would grab cameras, destroy the contents and eject photographers. That was tough for this film’s directors, but it forced them to be creative. It explains why there is a wealth of printed media



featured – ticket stubs, gig and festival posters, fabulous newspaper headlines.

Reason number two: the band has consistently refused documentary pitches, a fierce protectiveness that McGourty and MacMahon knew they would be up against from the outset. Therefore, their research and preparation were exhaustive, even finding an audio interview with drummer John Bonham. In fact, little is missing from the film.

The interviews with bassist John Paul Jones, Robert Plant, Jimmy Page

and Bonham’s widow Pat, ranged from five to seven hours each. From all of this, a tight two hours emerges, with the ultra-rare but utterly spellbinding live footage taking centre stage. Do not miss these performances. Sound quality was also made top priority, featuring the original lacquer cut from 1969 and with no compression.

Weirdly, given the band’s epic status, several major studios turned the movie down, creating a curious parallel with the attitudes the band faced in this era – the story was re-

telling itself. One of the studio’s issues was their belief that what audiences wanted was the debauchery. Well, that was me. So I’ll think about that next time I’m whingeing about being too good for adverts.



Kino are screening *Becoming Led Zeppelin* on Wednesday 5 March at 7:30pm and Thursday 6 March at 3pm and 7:30pm. Tickets can be booked at kino-teatr.co.uk.



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Fabulous dancing group

A Time to Shine

The Hastings Musical Festival has been captivating audiences for over 100 years. Every year, children and adults from 4 to 84 take the stage to showcase their talent in the categories singing, dancing, speech, mime/

drama, and Instrumental, all of which are marked by a specialist, expert adjudicator. With hundreds of participants, it's an exciting chance to build confidence and make memories. The festival starts on 23 February

and will run throughout March, with the finale concert taking place on 30 March, and would welcome an audience to help continue the support. Performers are travelling from Sussex, Kent, and Surrey to participate, and would love to share their talent.

FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS ARE:

- Speech, Drama and Mime from 24 to 27 Feb, drama throughout the week, medal classes on 27 February.
- 6 March: School choirs in the morning, adult classical singing in the afternoon and youth choirs in the evening, all in the main auditorium
- 6 March, 6 p.m. White Rock Studio: Molly Townson Evening of Classical Cabaret. This is a special event dedicated to Molly Townson, a beloved local figure whose contributions to the festival and the Hastings arts community were immeasurable. This evening will feature a selection of stunning vocal performances in honour of Molly, including Gilbert and Sullivan, vintage song, humorous and art songs. There will be a bar available; period costume welcomed.

- 13 March: Primary class instrumental in the morning, Gold Medal in the afternoon, recitals and Young Instrumentalist of the Year ceremony in the evening
- 18 March, evening: Dance Medals (Bronze, Silver, Gold). Young dancers will perform both their ballet and narrative solo routines for a combined score. This remains one of the most anticipated competitions in the Festival. Children aged 9-11 will qualify for Bronze, aged 12-14 for Silver, aged 15-20 for the Gold Medal.
- 19 March, afternoon: Singing, Gold Medal and Singing Championships. Evening, 6.00pm: amazing array of adult choirs.



Tickets for all sessions: White Rock Theatre box office. Hastings Musical Festival website: ticket packages for those wishing to attend multiple sessions. whiterocktheatre.org.uk/whats-on/event/hastings-musical-festival-2025 Please visit hastingsmusicalfestival.org.uk for more information. Also on facebook and Instagram.

Drawing Life for Carers and Cared-for

SUSAN JANE MURRAY

When Drawing Life was established ten years ago by Hastings resident Judy Parkinson, it offered free, regular, artist-led, creative sessions for people living with dementia and their carers.

Now Parkinson is extending the reach of this innovative and successful project to all unpaid carers and those they care for with monthly sessions at Hastings Contemporary beginning on 6 March 2025.

"It became obvious that the carers benefited just as much from Drawing Life sessions as those they

care for, and that the sessions were an invaluable social lifeline for people who find themselves isolated due to their myriad responsibilities caring for a loved one," says Parkinson. "With that in mind we have hatched a new format and extended our offer to people of all ages."

The fun, relaxed sessions will take place every first Thursday of the month from 2:30-3:30pm at Hastings Contemporary. Parkinson emphasises that no artistic experience is necessary and that the sessions and all materials are free of charge.

Participants will be encouraged to take inspiration from the work in the gallery and then make some marks and doodles. In fact, Mr Doodle himself, the well-known Kent-based artist, is supporting the project by donating free sweatshirts for participants.



Each session will be a bit different; the Drawing Life team will suggest a range of artistic methods, catering to diverse interests and abilities, ensuring that everyone can benefit from the transformative power of art.

All materials will be supplied free of charge as will conversation, tea and biscuits. "We know from ten years' experience that art activities make big differences to peoples' lives," says Parkinson. "Many carers have told us that our sessions are social occasions where they form invaluable friendships with other carers and us. Art opens conversations between carers



Mr Doodle

about memories and achievements—childhood, family, careers. Those they care for discover fun ways to express themselves and communicate feelings and memories non-verbally. The quiet concentration we observe every time is a precious sign that stress and anxiety are put aside for a while."

Drawing Life are very grateful to the National Lottery Community Fund, Hastings Contemporary and The Hastings Winkle Club for their support – as well as Mr Doodle. "Come and grab your free sweat shirt!" says Parkinson.



First class on Thursday 6 March, 2:30-3:30pm. To book please contact Judy Parkinson info@drawinglife.org. Let her know if you need help with transport or parking. The Studio, Hastings Contemporary, Rock-a-Nore Road, Hastings



BOOKBUSTER REVIEW

Reclaiming the Future

By Simon Hannah
Published by Pluto Books, 2024,
rrp £16.99
REVIEW BY TIM BARTON

The foreword to this excellent book is by John McDonnell MP, who contextualises Hannah's topic by noting that an historical perspective is necessary. To reclaim the future we must also reclaim the past, a past that includes workers solidarity, the founding of the NHS and of welfare provision. I must add, as Starmer and Reeves continue what is a right-wing agenda better fitted to the Tories than to Labour, that our project must urgently be, as well, to reclaim the present.

McDonnell says of our current predicament, 'The advocates of capitalism extol the setting free of uncontrolled animal instincts, combining to create the hidden hand of the market as the optimum method of economic decision making. Whilst socialists, recognising the chaos and crises this leads to, have looked to reason and rationality to control and plan economic processes. The reality is that planning has been an inherent feature of capitalism but it has been used to plan for profit maximisation and not to satisfy need.'

AN 'ECOSOCIALIST' ALTERNATIVE

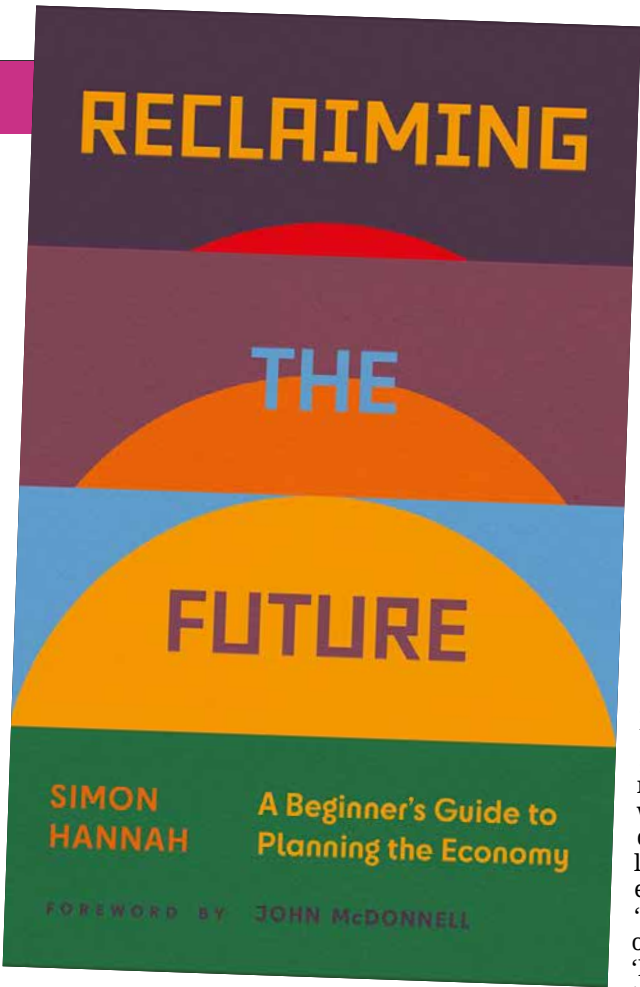
Hannah says that economic systems come and go, and insists that 'capitalism can and must be replaced'. The urgency of confronting capitalism today is both about creating a resilient social fabric that can weather at least some aspects of an inevitable global economic recession, one that locally will be a depression, and about changing our lifestyles to proof ourselves against the worst of the coming ecological chaos. Both these issues are absolutely beyond

the scope of capitalism, a greed oriented 'I'm alright, Jack', 'the devil take the hindmost' ecologically terminally destructive ideology.

The author takes us on a journey through the extremist economic ideology we live under, and argues for an 'ecosocialist' alternative. He explains that this should create social justice and ecological stability, where the current global free-for-all can only create inequality and exploitation. The first chapter asks 'how does capitalism work?', and runs through a standard Marxian analysis of, for example, surplus value and commodity fetishism. He also shows how 'scarcity' is a requirement of the system. A local example might be the deliberate withholding of land acquired for housing from development in order to artificially push the price up of what little developers do deign to build. This kind of land-banking should be illegal, but is a core economic tool for construction companies' profits, at our expense.

ECONOMIC IDEOLOGIES DESTROYING OUR PLANET

Ecologically, it is obvious that the collapse of ecosystems under industrial productivity is creating real scarcity, which makes addressing the rapacious nature of capitalism all the more urgent. A 'fix' based on the premise that scarcity is an illusion created by greedy economic models can't work if the bedrock of our ability to survive is under threat. And today, that threat is dire.



In this context, Hannah introduces Marx's concept of 'metabolic rift' – both class relations and 'metabolic rift originate from a unique, global process of violent separation of people from their means of subsistence, which also disrupts the biosphere.' There is some detail on this here, and it has long been contended that Marx addressed ecological issues in the nineteenth century, long before the emergence of a 'green movement'. This has some truth, but in the context of his extensive writings can be exaggerated: it is typical of the traditional left to do so, as there is a tendency to want to continue an essentially hierarchical 'dictatorship of the proletariat' under the guise of 'socialist democracy'. In reality many on the 'green left' have spent much of the last sixty years arguing that we urgently need to decouple left politics from 'the state' and pursue what Murray Bookchin termed 'social ecology'. This includes localist decentralisation, and grassroots democracy, but also 'international-

ism', a view we share with the traditional socialist movement, but one seemingly lost from mainstream Labour today.

Nonetheless, the traditional left has been right to interrogate the liberal idea that 'democracy' and 'economics' should remain distinct. A 'soft' version of this is seen in the pursuit of 'economic democracy' alongside 'social democracy', but in recent years this has not been remotely tough enough on the capitalist context in which it seeks a foothold. 'Change from within' can only come from below if it is to overthrow the economic ideologies destroying our planet, and only from the left if the resulting altered social relations are to be positive – at present the 'right' is stirring up those 'below' who need to act, directing them in ways that may ultimately help destroy current economic relations, but offering a bigoted exclusionary hell in its place. 'Reform' is needed, indeed revolutionary reform, but it is not 'Reform UK' that offer real alternatives that can help the

people find a stable and peaceful new economic ecology, quite the reverse. Many of the arguments against a leftist planned economy are addressed in the second half of the book, including for example 'human nature', the role of automation, the arguments for and against a 'universal basic income', and green concepts such as 'degrowth'.

Thus, books like this one become a necessary weapon to help resist the nationalist right-wing at the same time as seeking significant and real change. This is becoming urgent, and maintaining any optimism about the coming decades is not only hard, but possibly even stupid. Hannah acknowledges that 'lack of empathy runs deep in the modern world, fostered by prejudice and hate to divide us from our common humanity. 'A realist position must see how it is not a polite argument that will help us now, but bloodied noses. After decades arguing for some of the radical changes Hannah suggests, it is disappointing, but ultimately inevitable, to see mitigation strategies as the only game in town.

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CROSSWORD CORNER

Across

1. Financial fixer has no money left only one rand (6)

3. More unconventional and idiosyncratic from North Zaire shake-up (6)

4. A confused insect can be the most agreeable (6)

Down

1. Support with Japanese Buddhism can be bold and shameless (6)

2. Young child in US puts wig on rodent (3, 3)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 5 of The HIP List

1					2
	Hastings Independent Five-Clue Cryptic Crossword				
3					
	No. 271 by Peat Poser				
4					



Robbie the owner outside Basil's

Basil's Fungi Farm

Growing mushrooms in the heart of Hastings

KAYLA POWER

If you've ever wondered what it takes to grow mushrooms in an urban setting, then read on, because this process is happening just down the road from you, right in the heart of Hastings! Welcome to Basil's Fungi Farm.

Basil's Fungi Farm is run by Robbie and named after one of his favourite cats – Basil. The Farm is tucked away in The Yard in Hast-

ings. Once you leave the yard and step inside through a curtain of plastic sheeting, you are immediately greeted by the cool damp air of the grow room. The room is filled with wonderfully shaped and coloured mushrooms from floor to ceiling. The Farm grows and sells a variety of gourmet mushrooms focusing particularly on Oyster, Lion's Mane and Coral Tooth varieties. Basil's supplies a range of local grocers and farm shops, including the St Leonards Grocery and J. Fountain & Sons and the Michelin Green



Princess Pearl Oyster



Native Velvet Shank



Black Pearl King

star restaurant The Smallholding in Cranbrook.

On a recent visit to the Farm, Robbie walked us through the entirely hand-crafted enterprise. Firstly, Robbie makes all his own fruiting blocks from a mixture of sawdust, soy hull and water to make what looks like a compact bag of sawdust. Once mixed, these fruiting blocks are then sterilised with a handmade hot steam generator, removing any mould or yeast present, preparing them for the spores. Next, a home grown grain spawn is added to the now sterile fruiting box. Then, the mixture is stored in a heated room to incubate. During incubation, the spores grow into mycelium – the root system from which mushrooms bloom, which in turn grows and expands. Once it

has grown enough to produce a crop of mushrooms, it is moved to the grow room. By the way, you know it's ready when the whole bag that has started out brown has turned almost totally white from the mycelium growth! The grow room is the final destination for the production process and must be kept between 15 to 18 degrees, otherwise the mushrooms can be stunted and inconsistent in quality. This is where the magic happens. At this cooler temperature the mycelium blooms the mushrooms which are then gently plucked off the block, weighed, packaged and delivered to grocers and local restaurants and pubs to feature in some of your favourite dishes!

Recently Robbie has been experimenting with creating local varie-

ties of mushroom – by foraging and picking local mushrooms it's been possible for him to clone and produce these at scale – local varieties include a native velvet shank mushroom and a blue oyster mushroom found in Alexandra Park! (featured in one of the photos). The whole process is not dissimilar to a fantastic chemistry lab with amazing and delicious results.

Robbie hopes to set up an online ordering system soon when you'll be able to buy mushrooms ready to eat straight from the farm but for now you can experiment at home with a "grow kit" and literally grow your own.

If you would like to keep up with Basil's Fungi Farm, check out their Instagram @basilsfungifarm

Mushrooms: a climate opportunity?

EDWINA HUGHES

In this edition we've been treated to a peek inside Basil's Fungi Farm with an inspiring recipe from Andrew at the Crown featuring some of the mushrooms grown there. This feels like an ideal opportunity to give a shout out to the more humble mushroom varieties – I'm talking closed cup, chestnut or button mushrooms – all the ones we see on every supermarket shelf. These mushrooms can be a wonderful feature of home cooked meals.

While exotic mushrooms are ideal to take a starring role in a dish, sometimes a more subtle approach is needed. This is particularly true for those of you who simply hate mushrooms! If you are a mushroom hater or have one in your household or immediate circle then you may cast a quick eye over dishes which star mushrooms,, sigh audibly, and flick on to the listings page. But wait! What if I told you that mushrooms can be a brilliant filler for some of your meaty ground beef dishes? What if I explained that replacing some of the meat in a lasa-

gna, bolognese or cottage pie with the humble 'shroom could mean squeezing considerably more veg into the meal, enhancing the meaty taste with some smoky umami and doing a little for the climate too? That in fact mushrooms can enhance flavour rather than take away. Would you be interested? – Well, here's hoping...

Because from a climate perspective, swapping a little ground beef for mushrooms can make a big difference to the climate impactfulness of a dish. While there are lots of brilliant arguments for veganism and vegetarianism, most of us have grown up eating meat, enjoy it and want to continue to do so. What's the role for us? A big one actually! It turns out that because about 90% of the UK population eat meat, if we could all just eat a little less meat every week, we'd be making tons and tons (of CO₂) difference!

Smuggling more mushrooms into a dish will increase the proportion of veg in there – a nutritional plus-while delivering a flavour hit and you will be doing your bit for the climate with the food choices you make. Just something to consider next time you're cooking up a storm!



Crispy Chilli Fried Mushroom recipe

CRISPY CHILLI FRIED MUSHROOMS WITH PICKLED KOHLRABI, GINGER AND CUCUMBER SALAD

Serves 2
Cooking time: 30 mins

Ingredients:
Spice mix for mushrooms:
15g paprika, 3g cayenne, 10g ground cumin, 10g onion powder, 10g garlic powder, 9g coarse ground black pepper, 8g fine sea salt, 5g ground ginger, 100g flour (wheat, corn, gluten free, rice etc to suit), 100g water

Salad:
1 kohlrabi, 1 cucumber, ½ bunch mint, ½ bunch coriander

Dressing/pickle:
100g apple cider or white wine vin-

egar, 100g sugar, 100g water, a thumb of sliced ginger (or 2 tps ground)

Preparation method:

Mushroom prep:

- Use 3 to 4 large flat mushrooms per person. I recommend Oyster, Lion's Mane or Coral.
- Weigh out your flour and mix with equal weight of water to create a batter.
- Weigh out the other spices and mix thoroughly.
- Dip your mushrooms in the batter and then dredge in the spice mix.
- Shallow fry the spiced mushrooms in a frying pan on a medium heat, turning frequently to ensure even cooking. Drain the mushrooms on a paper towel to remove excess oil. Season with sea salt.

Salad prep:

- Combine pickled dressing ingredients in a sauce pan and bring to the boil. Cool to room temperature and pour over sliced and peeled kohlrabi ribbons (a mandolin works best but a peeler is also good). Add the fresh herbs.
- Stack your crispy mushrooms on top of your sweet and sour pickled salad and enjoy!

Chef hack: Source the best mushrooms you can find. The Crown uses locally grown exotic varieties cultivated at Basil's Fungi Farm, based in the Yard, Queens Rd. If you want something similar from a grocer/supermarket, look for oyster mushrooms, shitake or large portobello. If you want a quicker readymade spice mix, pick up a jar of cajun seasoning or fajita spice, they will work just as well. Save any leftover spice mix, which is gluten free and plant based, to use with other types of vegetables such as cauliflower and broccoli.

Andrew Swan and James Favell are chefs at The Crown Hastings, @thecrownhastings If you like the sound of this recipe and want to try it dining out; the Crown is currently serving 'Crispy chilli coral & oyster mushrooms, pickled kohlrabi, mint, ginger & cucumber salad, mushroom satay'.

FOOTBALL

United Take Rain Checks

15 February:
Hastings Utd 0,
Dulwich Hamlet 0

Hastings United were due to play three successive home games over the past two and a half weeks, with the prospect of improving their dire recent form. In the event, under remorseless deluges of rain, their Pilot Field pitch was only fit (and barely at that) for one of them, a goalless draw with Dulwich; the other two fixtures, against Canvey Island and

Wingate & Finchley respectively, were postponed until next month.

These postponements leave Hastings still winless in 2025. The point earned against Dulwich came after a run of seven defeats, and manager Danny Searle will have taken comfort from the fact that it was the first home league game since the opening day of the season last August in which the 'U's managed to keep a clean sheet. However, it's arguable that only some poor finishing by the visitors, plus a

couple of excellent saves by keeper Louis Rogers, enabled them to achieve this.

The nearest Hastings came to scoring was a deft header from Rodari from a corner that rebounded from the bar, and the follow-up shot from Kian Moyes, blocked on the goal-line. A late free kick from Ben Wells was also well saved by the Dulwich keeper.

Next up is an away fixture tomorrow (Saturday) at Cray Valley PM, currently fourth in the league table, then another match on the road against Chatham Town next Tuesday, before entertaining Hendon at the Pilot Field (pitch willing) on 8 March. Hastings lost 9-0 to the North London team in an abject display in November, but the latter have since then been in free fall, and are now themselves mired in the relegation zone. A beautiful game is unlikely.

TENNIS

Amherst Ladies Bounce Back

Two matches on successive Sundays at Amherst this month brought contrasting fortunes for the club's ladies team, playing in Division 2 of the Tennis Sussex Winter Doubles.

On 16 February the home duos,

Nikki Crowhurst paired with Pearl Hare and Anita Gedge with Jennifer Naylor, were overpowered under a wintry sun by a high-class and much younger foursome from Maresfield. Amherst only won seven games altogether in eight sets, a comprehensive annihilation.

But a week later, shifting from the sand-dressed astroturf courts to artificial clay on a morning of grey skies and gusty winds, Amherst were almost equally dominant against the David Lloyd Club of Worthing. This time they won all eight sets with a combined loss of ten games. Crowhurst and Hare were in fine form, while mother-and-daughter combination Debi and Jada Ani were also much too strong for the visiting pairs.

Amherst have one fixture left in the winter tournament, away at Cross-in-Hand. That's likely to be a much more even contest.

FOOTBALL

Danny Speaks His Mind

'U's manager Danny Searle answers questions from HUGH SULLIVAN before the game against Wingate & Finchley was postponed

HS: Danny, I'll start at the deep end. A Hastings United supporter on the Fans Forum website described the 0-0 draw with Dulwich Hamlet last Saturday as "an awful match between two awful teams on a regrettably awful playing surface... We keep hearing a lot about how one positive result will hopefully be a springboard to a run that will spare us from relegation but it is hard to imagine that a tedious goalless stalemate will provide the type of boost that we appear to need."

DS: I can't disagree with that summing up. But performances have been improving in recent weeks, and we look an altogether better team when we are playing away from home on a decent surface – either 3G, which is what the majority of clubs in the division play on, or on well-kept grass pitches such as at Bognor Regis, where we won after Christmas.

We had seven league losses on the spin from the beginning of January but in five of those games we deserved at least a point, if not three. This month, playing away at Horsham, who are a top-three side, we matched them until the 70th minute and were unlucky to lose. Against Lewes here, we dominated: they had only two shots on target in the whole game – the penalty kick

which Louis [Rogers] saved and the rebound which went in. Then, away at Cheshunt, we went a goal up, played really well and should have had a lot more. They scored with an unbelievable individual goal that the player will never repeat; then got a winner – again a stunning strike – in the 92nd minute.

HS: You may have had an unlucky run. But you are the lowest scorers in the league along with Bowers & Pitsea. How do you reverse that?

DS: We first had to sort ourselves out defensively – the manner in which we were conceding goals had to change. Now Teddy [Perkins] and Ollie [Black] are a settled pair at the back, and we can look to a more attacking style of play. Davide [Rodari] and Si [Ligendza] are a good combination up front and will score goals. Si came across from Eastbourne after a long period out – he played three-quarters of the game at Cheshunt, the full 90 minutes against Dulwich. When he's fully match fit, he'll be a very strong asset.

HS: The problem last Saturday was surely in midfield and on the wings – not providing enough service to the front men.

DS: I agree. The task is for the midfield and wide players to produce a penalty area threat. We en-



George Walker throws in, watched by Danny Searle (centre) and Sean Ray

courage full-backs George [Walker] and Alex [Kpakpe] to get forward, and they have done in past games. But, particularly at home, on the Pilot Field surface, it's very hard to play flowing football.

I heard a spectator last Saturday shouting – "Keep the ball on the floor!" That's just not possible when the simplest of passes bobbles and deviates. Away from home, we can play a different style and look a lot better.

HS: Your previous management roles have been with clubs at higher levels. What's different at Hastings?

DS: This is the first squad of senior players I've worked with who are part-time rather than full-time. And only a minority are contracted for the season. That means there's a constant pressure to recruit. I suppose it's the same for all clubs at this level, but it's particularly difficult to attract players to come here –

both because of the geographical location but also because of the problems we have with lack of training facilities.

HS: When and where does the squad train?

There is no 3G training pitch available to us in Hastings, so on Tuesday and Thursday evenings when we meet up, we either have to play on the Pilot Field pitch itself or negotiate the use of a 3G surface elsewhere. About a third of training sessions have been cancelled since I arrived at the beginning of December because the weather has rendered our own pitch unplayable and we had no alternative available.

This evening, for instance, we are able to train here because it's dry, but we are confined to the 30-by-40 metre area in the middle – the areas around the goalmouths have to stay protected.

HS: When Danny Bloor was in

charge in the first part of the season, they were using the 3G pitch at Eastbourne.

DS: But that's an extra half-hour or more of driving time not only for me (coming in from Essex) but for many of the squad who live in the North Kent or East Surrey areas. Getting a regular training surface around, say, Tonbridge, would be ideal. In the meantime we just have to make the best of what we've got.

HS: How is your relationship with the club directors and with the academy?

DS: Owners Dean and Ben [White] have been very good. They can't produce money or facilities that they don't have, but they appreciate that the team performances have been improving even if the results haven't, and have been constantly supportive.

I'm strictly contracted to manage the first team on a part-time basis. My involvement with the academy is something both I and the club would like to happen but, in the short term, the immediate task takes priority. I think the academy is well set up at respective age groups, but there's a big physical gap between under-18s and senior football at this level, and even 19- and 20-year-old kids find it a big step up.

HS: How about with the fans?

DS: The Hastings fan base is amazing, that's really the best thing about being here, especially for the players. We really appreciate their support.

HS: So can you turn things around in the 13 league matches that remain?

DS: I genuinely think we can. I know the games are ticking away, but last Saturday's performance was one in which our players were fighting, putting bodies on the line. They haven't given up.

We probably need six or seven wins to survive. Looking at the fixture list, I really think that's do-able if we all stick together. We'll need the place to be rocking on Saturday when we play Wingate & Finchley.

HS: Good luck!

JON SMALDON



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This year we have 2 amazing days filled with Choirs. Starting with the School Choirs Morning taking place on Thursday 6th of March at 9:30am. Followed by fantastic Youth Choirs starting at 6pm.

Wednesday 19th of March starts in the morning with our Showcase Choirs at 9:30am. Followed by the outstanding Adult Choirs starting at 6pm.



These 4 events are a fabulous watch and a great chance to see people of all ages take to the stage and share their love of singing.

Celebrating Young Talent: A Day of Instrumental

Thursday 13th of March at 9:30am starts with our Schools Instrumental & Orchestras. A brilliant chance to see the children enjoying making music together.

Our Young Instrumentalist of the Year takes place that evening at 6pm. The winner of this event is given an amazing opportunity to perform with the Sussex Concert Orchestra. They must qualify for this event from a previous class in the Festival.

