

Hastings Independent

275

25 April 2025

THE **FREE** & INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR HASTINGS



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



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Hastings Independent Press

Pirate Pitch



15 →

Crime and Punishment



4 →

HMP
LEWES

New Moves to Save St Mary

KENT BARKER

A new steering group has been formed to seek fresh and sustainable uses for St Mary in the Castle. The iconic Hastings building and concert venue has been closed since November 2022 when the Castle charitable trust ended its ten-year lease from Hastings Borough Council.

Now a group called the St Mary in the Castle Drivers Group (SMITCDG) is seeking specialists who can provide an 'Options Appraisal' to examine possible uses for the building. As a first stage, interested parties are invited to bring in fresh expertise along with ideas and concepts for the building which may not have been considered so far.

The SMITCDG is backed by the Hastings Commons heritage development trust and describes itself as "a team of individuals with a long history of supporting the building and a strong drive to find a solution as the building sits deteriorating".

They say that suggestions currently focus on creating a profitable space on the ground floor accessed from Pelham Arcade, which will complement the venue upstairs. Options for this may include a "Hastings History Experience and Tourism Centre", a "food & beverage-led approach", "partnership with a national/regional cultural organisation" or a wid-

er scheme, "including some residential development to cross-subsidise".

A budget of £10,000 is available for the successful group from the initial submissions to provide a final report including any research, development and expenses. It will be expected to complete the document of up to twenty pages within three months; interview 8-10 key people including HBC, previous staff, management, stakeholders and event managers to get a better understanding of what has worked or failed in the past; present viable options for a visionary outcome; and "think creatively and independently to create new, inspiring and brave options"

St Mary in the Castle was built between 1825 and 1828 forming the centrepiece of Pelham Crescent, designed by Joseph Kay for Thomas Pelham. Its Grade II* listing says: "The scheme provided all that the visitor could wish for. Within walking distance of the town centre, it included accommodation with unsurpassed sea views, set round a picturesque chapel. The enclosed arcade... advertised 28 shops 'for the sale of all fashionable merchandise' on the lines of John Nash's Royal Opera Arcade and Samuel Ware's Burlington Arcade in London. The church ceased to be used in 1970 and was sold to a nonconformist congregation, which found itself unable to maintain the building. After various abortive plans whilst the structure decayed further, in 1990 the Council acquired it."

Braga, Portugal, and Brazil



BERNANDO MARTINS PHOTOGRAPHY

HIP LIST 8 →



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EDITOR'S NOTE

As Jack in the Green revellers and legions of bikers prepare to celebrate May Bank Holiday in Hastings, the News pages examine how the public realm struggles to serve local people.

A special report reveals legal services to be in a parlous state, resulting in justice delayed being justice denied to all parties involved in court cases. Graffiti continues to blight communal spaces and attempts to assuage the many pressures on housing supply seem intractably mired in disagreements.

More cheerfully, the busy Community section focusses on a local volunteer superstar, Pip - a hub for grassroots ventures in Old Town, and a report on the packed Hastings Project 'Pints with Purpose' fundraiser at the Stade.

HIP's customarily broad art coverage embraces operatic satirists Gilbert and Sullivan, Brazilian-influenced music from Portuguese singer-songwriter Rita Barga, the dates of the forthcoming Comedy Festival gigs and plans for something new and intriguing in the rejuvenated St Andrew's Mews.

For a quieter life, our Food editor considers allotment life and the virtues of patience while awaiting this season's harvest.

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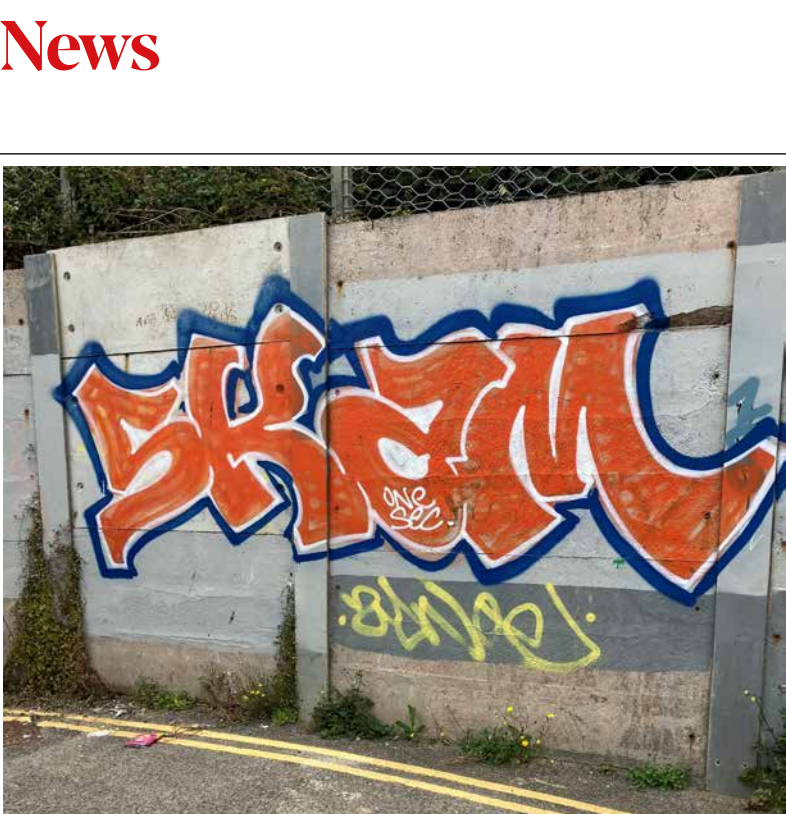
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Graffiti – Signs of Disengagement

TONY COLLINS

Some graffiti amounts to street art, takes hours to create, and is proudly shared on social media. More common, and more troublesome, are the tags, brief talent-free scribbles that take only a moment to apply. The main culprits are children, and it's common for each member of a group of friends to have their own tags, which function as a badge of identity. The young age of the perpetrators makes it that much trickier to take action.

This comment on social media site Nextdoor summed it up well: "Have the council stopped dealing with graffiti? The graffiti in the park near the old boating lake has been there for as long as I can remember. The scrawling on the traffic signs in Upper Park Road are getting worse by the day... we as taxpayers have to pay for the removal of this rubbish."

There is a widespread perception that the problem is getting worse. Actually, the number of reports of graffiti to My Hastings has fallen from 1153 in 2023 to 968 in 2024—though not every incident gets reported. To put the matter in perspective, the total number of reports to HBC's cleanup team in 2024, covering fly tipping, dog mess and the rest, was in excess of 14,000. That is a lot for the 24 staff on the response unit. Head of Waste Services, Cameron Morley, said, "We used to contract the graffiti cleaning to an

outside agency, we took it back in house in 2019, and the cleanup rate quadrupled."

Recently a team of enthusiastic volunteers repainted the pillars in Bottle Alley, under the direction of Studio ZeroH. The fresh blank surfaces proved just too tempting, and within 24 hours the taggers had returned.

HBC's Community Safety Officer, John Whittington, says, "It costs the council a lot of money, and certainly runs to tens of thousands of pounds. It's not just the work, it's the background admin. If the crew are clearing a council building, no problem, but if they have to clean a private property, they need a signed waiver first."

Like litter and fly tipping, tagging and graffiti are a sign of disengagement, a lack of civic pride. If you tolerate it, it sends a signal that no one cares, and the whole social edifice of the town begins the long slide towards the swamp. If you stay on top of it, you can set the community on a different path.

Is CCTV a solution? There are simply not enough staff to check camera records, and in any case most taggers are smart enough to wear a hoodie and mask. Convictions are few, and of course a Community Protection

Notice or Criminal Behaviour Order can be a badge of honour. In addition, some residents are queasy – and vocal – about the idea of cameras: civil liberties matter.

Tagging and graffiti are crimes – but it's low-level, and most citizens would prefer the police to concentrate on thieves and violent criminals. There is one PCSO in Hastings whose special brief is graffiti. If you report an incident to the police, the matter will rise up their agenda.

The real answer is collective effort. Graffiti probably won't be stopped altogether but Hastings residents can stay on top of the problem if they work together. The My Hastings website is constantly monitored, but the cleanup crews need input. There is no team of spotters reporting litter and graffiti: the council relies on the public's eyes and willingness to call the problems in.



Report crimes anonymously on CrimeStoppers, 0800 555111, or dial 101 to report non-emergency matters to the police. Contact My Hastings on my.hastings.gov.uk Cllr Tony Collins is a Green councillor for Central St Leonards.



Hastings Craft Weekend

Observer building, Hastings
Saturday 24th & Sunday 25th May 2025

Private View
Friday 23rd May, 6pm onwards

Featuring work from:
Adam Kester / Whelan's Weaving / Ink and Clay
Modern Goods / EH Mosaics / Carola van Dyke
Uniform Jewellery / Katie Boccacini Meadows
Melo Clay / Rowan Corkhill / Claire Buckley
Bekky May / Tala Home & Living / Makemark
David Bracher / Holly Dawes / Loose Fit Furniture
Scott Garrett / RK Ceramics / Jo McAllister
Woodmugler / Crafty Basketry / Botanical Dye
Mudmikes / Aurora Barrett / Pod Lights
Laslett England / Jane Fryers Millinery / Katja Seaton
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* L= LOW TIDE H = HIGHTIDE For beach safety advice visit: rnli.org/safety/beach-safety

Moves on 'Abandoned' Clifton Court

HUGH SULLIVAN

Clifton Court, a block of 53 flats owned by housing association Orbit, remains vacant around three-and-a-half years after its tenants began to be decanted for prospective redevelopment. A spokesperson for Orbit indicated last week that demolition and rebuilding options for the three linked buildings on the corner of Holmesdale Gardens and Linton Road are currently being discussed in a working partnership with Hastings Borough Council "to ensure that our plans meet their sustainability criteria".

There is no suggestion from either party that the buildings should or could be patched up to provide shorter term emergency accommo-

dation, nor any communicated sense of urgency to progress intended works. This is despite protests and a brief occupation of the block last July by local campaigners, Housing Rebellion, complaining of its abandonment.

The Orbit spokesperson said that the housing association is "acutely aware of the current demand for affordable housing in Hastings" and is aiming to provide "as many affordable homes on the site as planning and environmental decisions allow... Once options have been agreed, we will consult with stakeholders and the general public, to give them the opportunity to comment on our proposals, and ensure the site meets the needs of the local community and demonstrates the longevity that they are seeking and deserve."



In a 2021 newsletter, Orbit had told its tenants that it would cost at least £5 million to improve heating, insulation and safety in the existing

buildings "to meet modern standards", and that a better option might be to redevelop the entire block. Either way, all residents were told

they would have to move out in order for work to take place.

By July 2023 the block was fully vacated. Taking into account changes in regulatory controls – not least, the enactment of the post-Grenfell Building Safety Act under which building managers may face criminal charges if they fail to demonstrate effective measures to combat safety risks – Orbit seems by then to have reached a settled decision that only full demolition and reconstruction would serve its purpose.

Hastings BC Housing & Community Wellbeing Portfolio Holder Cllr Glenn Haffenden has clearly endorsed this approach. Some months ago he messaged on Nextdoor: "They [Orbit] are demolishing to build more homes, more sustainable homes, cheaper to run homes, more environmentally friendly homes and also homes that meet the current housing requirements." However, no timeline has been mentioned.

In the meantime, Orbit has apologised to tenants of the neighbouring block The Hermitage, which it also manages, for allowing a build-up of obnoxious waste in the back yard of Clifton Court after refuse collectors' access was obstructed. This issue "has now been resolved", its spokesperson said.

Hastings Decides on Housing

KENT BARKER

Residents of Hastings are being consulted on their views about at least three important areas over the next few weeks and months. The most contentious is likely to be the long-delayed development plans for the old Bathing Pool site at West Marina in St Leonards.

A public meeting has been called by Hastings Borough Council's chosen developer – a joint venture between the Essex-based Generator Group and County Gate Properties. The latter, a housing development specialist, says: "the site offers a unique and exciting opportunity to create a place where people can live, work and enjoy leisure time. The overarching aspiration is to develop a high-quality environment, through characterful and intelligent design, quality construction and complimentary landscaping, whilst focussing on integrating into the existing surrounding physical and social infrastructure."

The Generator Group also stresses that the plans will be "residential-led" but says they have a commitment to community engagement and are seeking feedback which, "where possible", will be used to inform their plans before they are

submitted to the Council later this year. Meanwhile the West Marina Partnership – an umbrella organisation for clubs, organisations, and community members interested in the development, will be holding their own meeting immediately beforehand. It is understood that the group has not been consulted by the developers despite producing detailed recommendations earlier this year.

Opponents of a second potential housing development site – Sandrock Bends on the Ridge – are also holding a public meeting to discuss what they describe as a "disaster in the making". The Save Sandrock Bends campaign say developers want to build 80 private homes "on one of the last unbroken natural routes for hazel dormice, badgers, bats, deer, and countless other species" on land that links St Helen's Woods with the High Weald countryside.

This, along with other proposed housing developments, comes as the Council seeks local views on a new Housing Strategy for the town. Residents are invited to take part in an online survey and to attend consultation events. The stated intention is to produce a five-year strategy which will "meet our ambition for everyone in the town to have a decent place to live".

While this is primarily focused

on social housing and the rental sector, HBC along with other local authorities has been given extremely ambitious targets for finding new housing development land. Following last year's general election, the Local Government Chronicle reported that Hastings would be expected to identify land for 722 homes, up 47% from the previous figure of 490. In the past, councillors have argued the targets are unachievable given Hastings' dense urban environment and surrounding protected areas like the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Hastings Country Park.

Other local planning commentators believe there are considerable areas of publicly-owned land held by institutions such as the NHS and British Rail that could be earmarked for housing. Nonetheless the ambitions of house-builders and the government are likely to continue to face fierce opposition from local residents and environment groups who don't want to see new houses in their 'backyard'.



Ridge Housing
Public Meeting
Thursday 24 April
7.30pm St Helen's
Church [savesandrockbends.co.uk](https://www.savesandrockbends.co.uk).

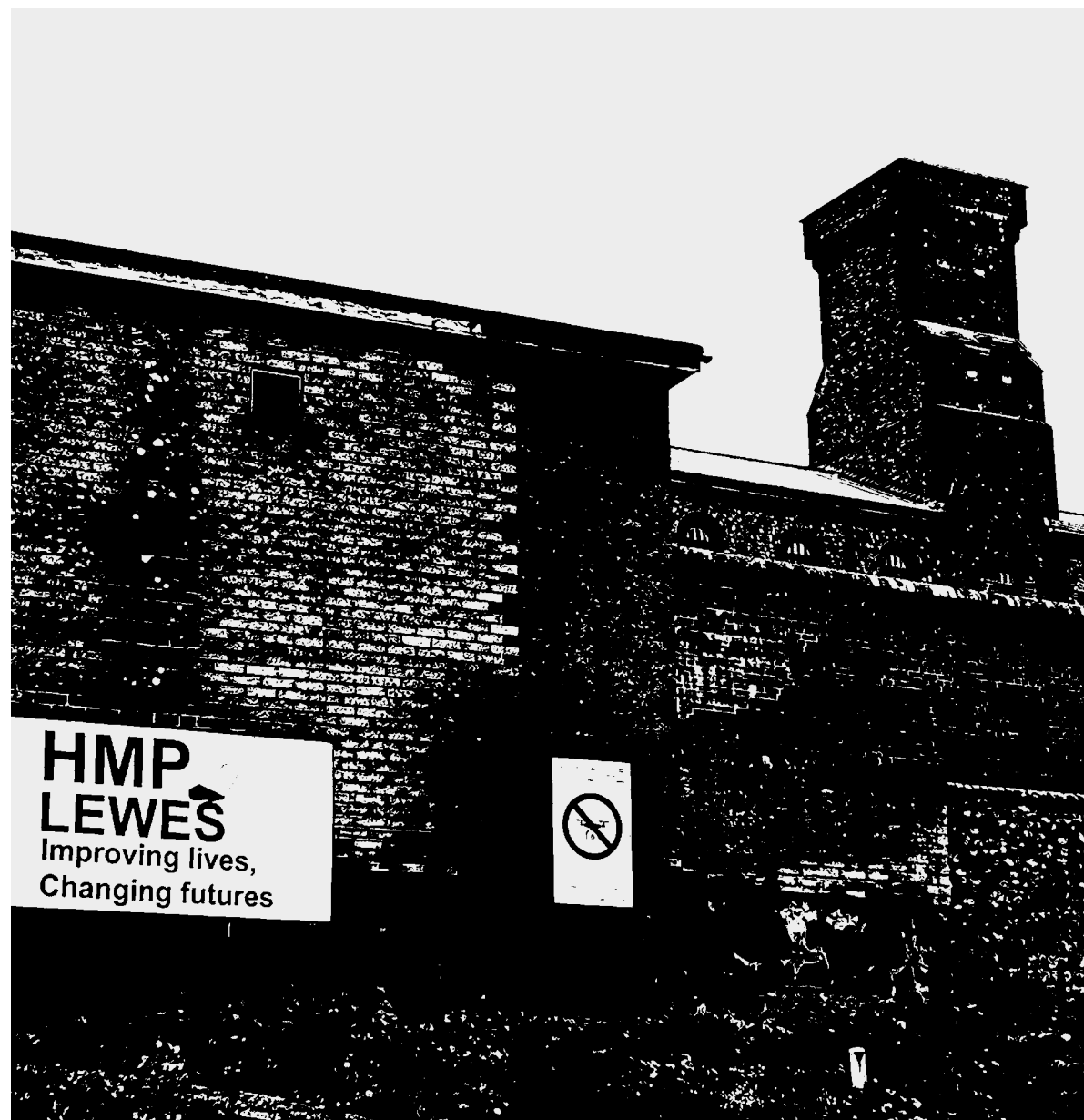
West Marina Partnership Community Meeting Sunday April 27 2.00pm Marina Park, Seaside Road. West Marina St Leonards Ltd, Exhibition of proposals Tuesday 29 April 3.00pm Project Space Electro Studios Seaside Road. hastings.gov.uk/housing/housingstrategy

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Crime and Punishment in Hastings

Few would disagree that Britain's criminal justice system is in crisis. Prisons so overcrowded that inmates are released early, courts so backlogged that defendants wait up to two years for trial, and serious crime on the rise. Government has pledged to recruit 13,000 more police officers, putting 'Bobbies back on the beat'. But more police mean more arrests; more arrests mean more court appearances and more delays, which ultimately means more prison overcrowding. In this special report, KENT BARKER examines Crime and Punishment in Hastings.

Underfunded Courts Leave Innocent Jailed

RICHARD BODY

I've been a lawyer since 1987. I set up my firm, Richard Body Law Ltd, in 1999 almost exclusively doing criminal defence work covering Hastings and Eastbourne. In a recent month we covered 47 hearings at Hastings Magistrates' Court, 30 at Lewes Crown Court, advised 156 suspects at the police station, and acted as duty solicitor on 13 days.

Around 90% of Hastings crime is dealt with in the Magistrates' court. 10% is more serious and goes to Lewes Crown Court. There have been delays in the Magistrates' Court for years, and it's not getting better. They have the courtrooms but don't have enough legal advisors who sit with the lay magistrates. So three cases may be listed for a slot where there is time to do one, and the others get relisted. With more legal advisors they could get through the backlog.

Previously, people held by police in custody would be produced in front of magistrates next day in Hastings or Eastbourne. The Eastbourne court has closed and Hastings Magistrates don't deal with custody cases now, so everybody has to be taken to Brighton, which causes big problems for local solicitors because of the distance. The Brighton court takes remand hearings from the whole of Sussex, so sometimes they continue sitting into the evening trying to get through them. One colleague said they were still going at 7.00pm when she left.

Generally, in Lewes Crown Court they are getting cases scheduled within the custody time limits of 182 days, but only just. However, there's a knock-on effect because many defendants on bail get their cases delayed instead. Lewes is not as bad as Maidstone - where it would be quite common to have your case fixed for trial in 2027. In Lewes, if you're on bail, you'll have it scheduled for maybe 14 months' time. It's

not good for our clients or the complainant or the witnesses, or anyone who has this hanging over them. Lots of my clients have been held in custody awaiting their trial and then been acquitted at the end of it. The conviction rate in the Crown Court is not much more than 50% so you could easily spend six months in jail for something you didn't do - and it could be longer because sometimes the custody time limits do get extended.

They could have part time judges - recorders - clearing the backlog or preventing it from getting any longer, but budgets have been cut so they can't afford them. Another big problem is the lack of barristers - especially prosecutors on the RASO (Rape and Serious Sexual Offences) list.

Many of us are getting to retirement age, so unless there are more people coming in, the problem will get worse. Duty solicitors locally are in their late 50s or early 60s. We've got nine solicitors in our firm whose average age is probably 60. Newly qualified solicitors don't want to do criminal work. I've got two sons, both are lawyers but they don't want to do crime because it doesn't pay. Criminal legal aid is just not high enough these days to provide a de-

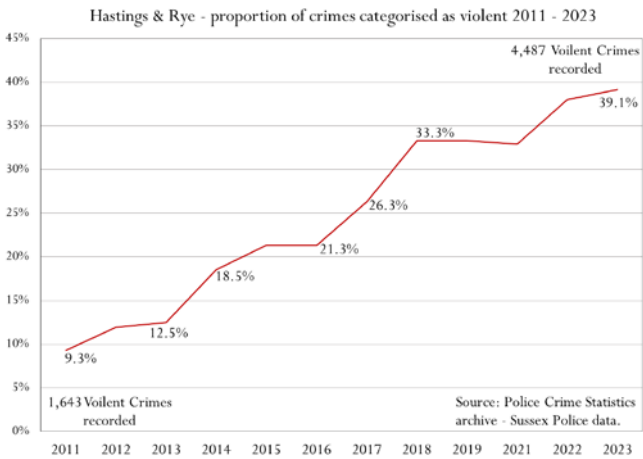


Lewes Crown Court

cent income. It is going to be a big problem in a few years' time.

Frankly it is ridiculous there are court rooms sitting empty, and they

can't pay for one more legal advisor in the Magistrates' Court, and they can't fund enough Judges to deal with the Crown Court backlog.

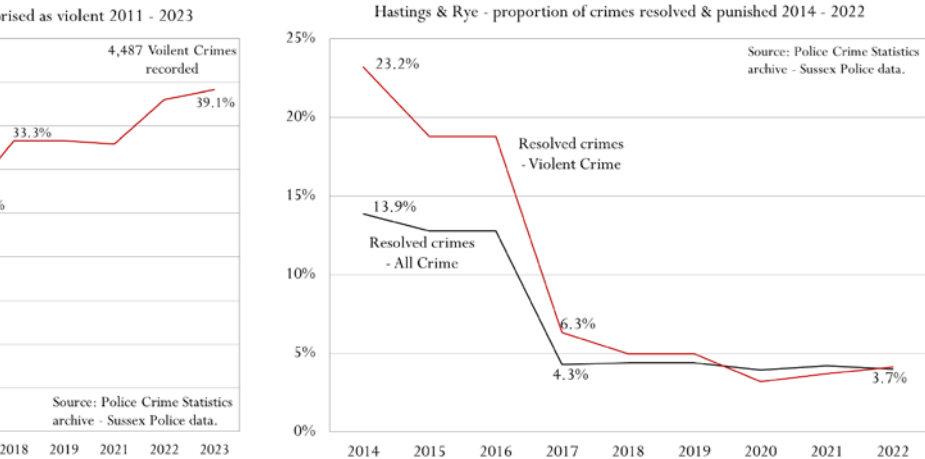


Total crime rates have remained fairly constant over the past decade. 12,000 were reported in 2012, and 11,400 in 2023. But violent crime and sexual offences have seen a very sharp rise, up from 1,643 instances reported in 2011 to 4,487 in 2023 – an increase of 173%. Almost one in ten crimes reported in Hastings are now in this category.

But how many are successfully prosecuted? The answer is: far fewer than a decade ago. ‘Resolution’ of reported crime means an outcome leading to a caution, fine, community service or prison sentence. In 2014 14% of reported crime was resolved. In 2023 it was down to 4%. That means only 456 out of the 11,400 reported crimes led to a caution or conviction.

HASTINGS MAGISTRATES COURT

If you are arrested and charged by police, you are likely to appear before the magistrates in Bohemia



road. The Ministry of Justice does not release figures for individual Magistrates’ courts, but nationally there is a backlog with more than 5,000 ‘open’ cases. This means long delays. On average you can expect to wait for 239 days for your case to be resolved; that’s more than 30 weeks. On the day HIP visited the magistrates court, all three cases were being heard more than a year after the original offence. And if you are accused of a serious crime – murder, rape or robbery - you will be remanded for trial to the Crown Court in Lewes, where the wait could be even longer.

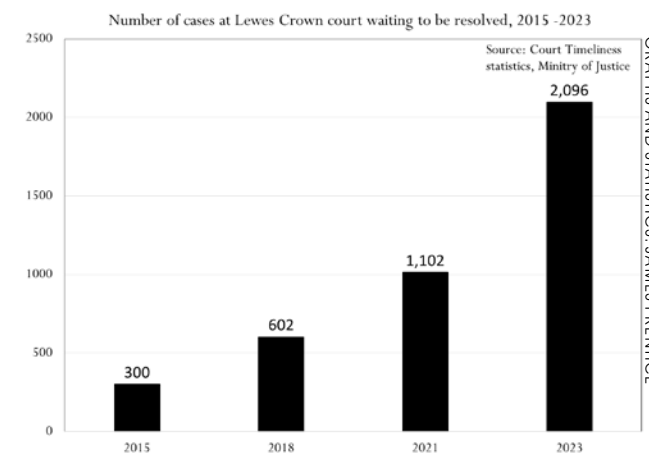
LEWES CROWN COURT

On one fairly typical day earlier this month there were 37 cases scheduled to be heard before nine different judges in the four courtrooms at Lewes. The busiest judge was Her Honour Judge Laing KC who was due to preside over seven of them. Mostly she would be hearing pleas or applications for further remands

rather than a full trial, but the numbers mean that there is a severe backlog of cases. In 2015 there were fewer than 300 cases at Lewes CC waiting to be resolved. By 2023 that figure had risen to 2,096

The Public Accounts Committee of MPs reported last month that the population of defendants on remand waiting for their cases to be heard is at its highest level for fifty years. One in twenty of those in custody awaiting their trial had been on remand for more than two years. The committee warned that some were spending longer on remand than the sentence they eventually received. And, crucially, they point out that 13% of those who have been waiting in prison were acquitted, i.e. found not guilty, while more than a third did not ultimately receive a custodial (prison) sentence.

Theoretically a ‘Custody Time Limit’ of six months is in place for Crown Court defendants held in jail, but a House of Commons report



from 2022 showed that 32% of the remand population had been held for longer than that.

LEWES PRISON

More than half of the 578 men held in Lewes were on remand awaiting a date for their trial. The most recent inspection of HMP Lewes found the jail “battling rising violence, self-harm, drugs and a churn of men caught in a cycle of homelessness and offending as the prison service continues to grapple with the effects of the population crisis... many men spent as little as two hours out of their cell a day. Concerningly, when first night cells were full, men were instead held in cells on the wing that housed sex offenders or others wanting to be kept separate from the main population where they received no induction and very little support or time out of cell until a cell became available.”

The report found that the Government’s early release scheme was undermining safe release planning

and risk management. Release dates for some high-risk prisoners had been brought forward at short notice, forcing already stretched resettlement agencies to redraw existing plans from scratch in as little as two or three weeks. In one case, a high-risk prisoner who was a risk to children had his release date brought forward despite having a history of stalking, domestic abuse and being subject to a restraining order.

COUNTY COURTS

County Courts are civil, not criminal, dealing with things like money issues, contract and property disputes, personal injury claims and family matters such as divorce and child custody. Although not part of our Crime and Justice analysis, average delays for cases across the country’s 170 courts is just over a year, with delays at Hastings County Court averaging 501 days – making it the twelfth worst in the country.

Your Day in Court

On a recent Friday, only one out of three magistrates’ courtrooms at the Bohemia Road Law Courts was in use. And there the staff were stretched – the usher had to be brought in on her day off, so had no knowledge of the cases. Private solicitor Simon Allen was due to handle three cases for the Crown Prosecution Service. First was a disabled woman who changed her plea to guilty after kicking two police officers who were called to remove her from a private residence last year. It was, observed the chief magistrate, not her finest hour, and he ordered a pre-sentence report and set the next hearing for 9 June.

In the next case, the defendant, who wasn’t present, applied for an adjournment to collect new evidence as to why her car had run out of petrol on a motorway early last year causing severe tailbacks and leading to a charge of careless driving. After some delay, her solicitor appeared on a video link, but no new date could be mutually agreed



until 26 September - nearly two years after the alleged offence.

Finally, a 65 year old HGV driver from Battle pleaded not guilty to using a hand held mobile device to photograph an accident on the A14 near Cambridge. The court was played body-worn camera footage from the arresting officer PC Sam Shepherd in which the defendant admitted the offence and said it was a ‘fair cop’. However, the court heard that this would attract a penalty of another six points on his license bringing the total to twelve and automatic disqualification. His

defence solicitor questioned PC Shepherd at length down a video link from Cambridge – after more delays to set it up – suggesting what he had seen was the defendant’s tea mug and not a phone. In his own evidence, the driver swore he did not have a mobile phone in his hand and did not take a photo or video at any time and was suffering mental health issues following a motor accident of his own as well as PTSD from tours of duty in the army in Ulster and the Falklands.

The magistrates returned after lunch to pronounce him guilty, and would not accept that losing his license would cause him ‘exceptional’ hardship. They ordered him to pay £2,018 in fines and costs, despite him claiming he’d lose his job, wouldn’t be able to pay his mortgage and would become homeless.

So a full day in the magistrates’ court tried just one case, adjourned another and ordered a probation report on a third, doing little or nothing to reduce the already lengthy delays for hearings. “There simply aren’t enough court staff”, said one solicitor, while another described the delays caused by underfunding as “bonkers”. The frustration of the three magistrates was also evident.

The Nightmare Scenario

You’re walking along the seafront in Hastings one evening and come across a serious assault. The assailant flees and you help the victim, who is bleeding copiously. The police arrive and arrest you as you are covered in his blood, and, in his confusion, he identifies you as the perpetrator.

You are held overnight in a police cell and escorted to Brighton next day for the remand hearing. The victim is badly injured and might die, and you could be charged with manslaughter or even murder, so you are remanded in custody to Lewes jail. Your trial is set for six months’ time, but that gets extended and you remain locked in a cell for 22 hours a day.

Just before the trial a motorist comes forward with dashcam footage showing there was another person involved, which is corroborated by a witness in the flats opposite.



At the trial, you are acquitted and walk out a free person. But you could have spent anything up to two years in one of the worst remand prisons in the country, despite being absolutely innocent. If the court backlog wasn’t so long your trial would have happened many months earlier.

Government figures show that of those held in jail on remand, one in five were not sentenced to a prison term, and one in 10 were found not guilty. Hastings defence solicitor Richard Body told HIP: “You could easily spend six months or longer in jail for something you didn’t do. It’s not uncommon.”

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

✉Letter

CATASTROPHIC
BENEFIT CUTS

Dear HIP
Well done for your front-page coverage in issue 274 of the government's planned cuts to disability benefits and the likely impact of these on disabled people and their families in Hastings and beyond.
We've been horrified by these plans, which the Department for Work and Pensions' own impact assessment predicts would drive 300,000 people into poverty, including 50,000 children.
As we know from our work, disability and fuel poverty are closely linked. Indeed, 72% of the thousands of people that Energise Sussex Coast helped through our free energy advice service last year had a disability or long-term health issue.
The government has implied that the impact of the cuts will be offset by £1 billion of employment support measures "to help disabled and long-term sick people back into work".

However, it is also planning to have MPs vote on the cuts before the Office for Budget Responsibility has even had a chance to assess how effective – if at all – these measures are likely to be. (When the OBR assessed the previous government's now-abandoned plans to restrict disability benefits, it concluded that only 3% of those affected would find paid work.)
In reality, as the disability charity Scope notes, these cuts would be "a catastrophe for disabled people's living standards and independence". We urge your readers to use writetothem.com to contact Hastings' MP, Helena Dollimore, and urge her to change her mind and vote against them.

Gabriel Carlyle
Energise Sussex Coast

✉From our website

FOLLOW THE MONEY

Christopher Dodwell's article *Follow the Money* in HIP Issue 274 should be blown up to poster-size

and plastered all over town.
If you look into the cumulative actions against local democracy by the last few governments, you can see the long road to the demise of community-oriented councils in favour of big-business developers. Once you see that, it finally becomes clear that the one and only reason we're now being tipped headlong into a county unitary council with a far-off mayor in charge is that it's the system best suited to 'Special Economic Zones' – that is, giant, corporate, business estates acting as tax havens for the wealthy.
The real blinder in all this is that the last few line-ups we've had at Hastings Borough Council have put their heads down and tried to run the council as though they still had funds and an ability to act, the main result of which was to persuade large swathes of the community that it is totally useless and might as well be scrapped.
It's not too late to fight back. Fill in the consultation if you want to – might as well, as the current oh-so-biddable council leadership agreed to fund it. Say 'no' to the mayor, 'no' to putting everything at county level, and 'yes' to one of the 'options' with an element of local representation. The government won't be bound by that consultation, though. It's also necessary to explain the nature of the con any way we can, until everyone gets it.
Thank you, Christopher Dodwell for the best contribution yet to that effort, and thank you, HIP, for publishing it.

Kay Green
✉From our website

ALDERMEN ABOLISHED

A Lost Transport of Delight in HIP 274 was a fascinating article, I knew nothing about this! A couple of minor errors, though. Firstly, Hastings had (and still has) a mayor, not a lord mayor. And, secondly, councillors were not known as aldermen at that time. Councillors were elected in the same way they are now. Aldermen were appointed to the council by the elected councillors. Aldermen were abolished in the 60s, because the system was open to widespread abuse, with local businessmen bribing councillors to appoint



them as aldermen. They had the same functions and responsibilities as councillors, but without the responsibilities to an electorate in a particular ward.

Peter Chowney

✉Letter

WHAT FUTURE FOR AZUR?

Dear HIP
Twenty years ago or so, large amounts of public money was spent on eye catching projects such as the Sussex Exchange off Queensway, The Bridge in Ore and Azur in St Leonards. None of them are flourishing as they were imagined to - probably because the money was dropped from on high for capital spending without proper planning for revenue income. Azur is a particularly prominent example of how a project to create regeneration has turned within 20 years into degeneration and dereliction. It was built with expensive materials but it is also a high maintenance building. The builders were obviously out of their depth since the funnel shaped skylights have been placed so that two funnels point in one direction while one points in another direction. The architect I understand has disowned it and it is not on his website. The vandalised wreckage of the building now serves no purpose apart from obscuring the magnificent listed colonnade of James Burton which has flourished for

200 years - never mind 20. Why not dismantle Azur and maintain the original Sidney Little Marina Pavilion on the ground floor which is eminently usable still. The expensive coloured glass used in Azur could be recycled to Bottle Alley and perhaps the staircase down from the promenade could be remodelled as a modern entrance with signage to draw customers.

Robin Holtom
✉From our website

IGNORANT DESTRUCTION

On the front page of issue 274, you asked readers to share their views about graffiti.
I moved to Hastings seven years ago, and what breaks my heart and disgusts me on a regular basis is all the graffiti. No sooner is Bottle Alley repainted in the pastel shades the great architect Sidney Little wanted, than some little swine disfigures the walls and pillars with spray paint or black marker pens. The gracious shelters are also regularly vandalised. Graffiti is worse than anti-social, it is wilful and ignorant destruction.
Whilst we are on the subject of Sidney Little's heritage, cannot the lido be reconstructed? Its demolition was a prime example of scandalous municipal vandalism. But that's another topic again.

Roger Lewis

May Day March & Rally
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Tax the Rich!
Welfare not Warfare!

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Cornwallis Gardens TN34 1LR
March to the Old Town

VOTE NO!

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Helena
Dollimore,
to vote against
Labour's
benefit cuts.

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<https://chng.it/YTnMCJ2qmT>



Organised by
Hastings & District Trades Union Council

We would love to
hear from you.

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

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Telling the Stories of the Four Courts

JOHN RANKIN

Some time in the near future, the Four Courts in Stonehouse Drive will be demolished. This is an important event in terms of the culture and heritage of Hastings and St Leonards.

BUT WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

These tower blocks, providing nearly 400 households, stand sixteen stories high and 'can be seen for miles' as the saying goes. They were built in 1963 and were originally referred to locally as 'The Wimpey Towers', presumably after the housebuilder of the same name. They went on to be named after four 20th century leading politicians, two British and two American, perhaps signifying this country's obsession with a perceived 'special relationship' with the US: Bevin,

Churchill, Roosevelt and Kennedy. The tower blocks are owned by Southern Housing, a social housing provider, who have not yet applied to the local authority, Hastings Borough Council, for permission to demolish, but are already consulting local residents about the intended process.

It is not known yet what will replace these towers. They sit on a sizable parcel of land with a lot of green amenity space, car parking and community buildings. The parcel of land is much larger of course than the footprint occupied by the towers themselves, so you might be forgiven for assuming that much higher density housing will occupy the site in the future. Indeed, if you look at some Inner London boroughs such as Lewisham, this process has been happening for the best part of a decade.

The tragedy of this is that communities can sometimes be erased, and if, like me, you feel that part of

us 'becomes' forever connected to the places we lived in for any appreciable amount of time, a quiet tragedy seems to occur.

The first and most obvious concern is the potential loss of amenity space. There is pressure on housing supply, and this must be addressed, but do we miss something by replacing grass, community play spaces, small wooded copses and community halls with more housing? Is the overall effect negative? I simply ask the question so that we can consider it.

At the time of writing, there are a number of community organisations, such as 'four courts connect' who do outstanding work with residents, and there is a question about what will become of these community organisations. The issue of utmost importance, however, in my view, is what will become of those families, extended families and social networks once the built environment which facilitated them is gone. Wherever these families and networks go, there must be a tangible record made of their existence, function and achievement. Imagine the life stories, the shared experiences of joy, pain, sorrow and fulfilment deposited in the bricks and steel of the towers. Psychoge-



Four Courts

ographers must be incentivised to make films and take photographs, and writers and journalists must put on record the stories of over half a century of life in these Hollington towers.

Most importantly, people must be looked after, and their stories heard

and listened to. Their hopes and fears for the future and their feelings about legacy have to be engaged with, acted upon and remembered.

John Rankin is the Labour councillor for Conquest Ward on Hastings Borough Council.



Pip at Pip's place

Pip, Pip Hooray: new lease of life for Old Town shop

CHRIS CONNELLEY

Strong community is one of the most obvious virtues of our town, and one that born-and-bred local Pip Hersee is proudly showcasing in his new eponymous venture at 4 George Street, in the beating heart of the Old Town.

Soft launched a fortnight ago, in

premises owned by six generations of his family, and most recently occupied by Bells Bicycles who moved out earlier this year, the newly refurbished building has been reconceived as a tranquil, white walled space that can shapeshift and adopt different identities for different functions.

On the day I visited, a children's Easter holiday art class had just finished, an exhibition of art works

were available to peruse (some of which featured in exhibitions 35 years ago when his dad briefly ran the place as a gallery), whilst the retail space to the front of the Grade II listed building was dispensing a range of healthy juices and infusions designed to invigorate, support immune systems and nourish the soul. The feisty ginger shot offered to me as a sample certainly made its presence felt, jolting me out of my Friday afternoon, post fast food lunch lethargy and putting a jaunty spring in my step.

There's also a small consultation room at the back that's being used by therapists, and a cellar that, in the next phase of work, Pip plans to bring back into use as an events space.

With the summer tourist season now up and running, he's also planning to tap into the Old Town's well developed outdoor festivals and events programme, starting with Jack in the Green over the upcoming May Day bank holiday weekend.

As a former Royal Ballet trained dancer, he's hoping to run performance and movement classes, and wants to connect with the growing network of organisations working on men's development in the town that, in common with many coastal communities, manifests some serious health issues and, in September, sees us form part of the biannual Baton of Hope national suicide awareness tour.

His passion for his home town is real, and his enthusiasm is utterly infectious. Pip's is a family business with a heart, and he's keen to connect with like-minded souls.

Sounds good to me. Pip, Pip, hooray.



Pints with Purpose Packs Stade Hall

The Hastings Project is a community interest company that brews beer to raise money for local good causes. Earlier this month, it hosted a packed evening at Stade Hall to showcase a number of local charities, including the Refugee Buddy Project, Little Gate Farm, Spun Glass Theatre and the Samaritans.

Their community project lead worker, Ed Nash, explains: "Pints With Purpose was all about celebrating the incredible work happening within our community while bringing people together over a pint, great food and live music. It was a busy, lively evening that allowed members of the public to chat and understand the vital work that some charities do in our community.

"We'd like to extend our thanks to all the charities involved, as well as everyone who came along to support the event – and is now looking

to get involved with local volunteering opportunities! We had an absolute blast and can't wait to do it again.

"We're also excited to announce a new beer for Jack in the Green brewed with our pals at Villages, which will be available just in time for May Day. In addition, we have two pub quizzes lined up at The Albion in Hastings and the Ypres in Rye, raising funds for Jack in the Green and The Hastings Therapy Centre.

"And we're also working on a collaborative beer with Goat Ledge, with proceeds going towards Surfers Against Sewage."



To find out more about the Hastings Project, go to thehastingsproject.co.uk

Community Superstars

In the first of a new regular feature focusing on local people who volunteer in the community, we profile Matt Cottrill, one of the team at the Hastings Rocks Film Festival

Who are you and what do you do?
I'm Matt Cottrill and I'm a student at the University of Brighton, where I'm studying Film.

How did you get involved in the Hastings Rocks Film Festival?
Part of our course is an industry placement, and the university helped me find this role which I was fortunate enough to get an interview for.

What will you be doing at the film festival?
I'm helping with promotion, front of house, sound and recording key

parts of the event.

What's your favourite film in the festival?
My favourite film is *The Waiter, The Scientist and Jenny*. It's a documentary about someone who leads a very unique and interesting way of life.

What's your favourite film more generally?
My favourite film in general is *Heat* by Micheal Mann because the intensity really hooks me in.

What film have you watched most often?

I've watched all the *Die Hard* films more times than I can even remember!

Who's your favourite director?
My favourite director is Christopher Nolan because I remember watching the *Batman* Trilogy as a child and every film he's made after that has stuck with me.

Is there a classic or highly rated movie you don't especially like?
I wasn't a massive fan of *Everything, Everywhere All at Once*. I was really surprised when it swept the Oscars.

What are you hoping to do after university?
I'm hoping to find a job within the film industry so I can work somewhere where my passion lies.

What's the best thing about living in Hastings?
One of the best things about Hastings is the fish markets on the sea-front. They have some of the greatest mackerel I've ever had!



The Hastings Rocks Film Festival is reviewed on our website - follow the QRcode. To nominate a Community Superstar, please email community@hastingsindependentpress.co.uk



CHRIS CONNELLEY



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Like a Soap on Stage

SADIE PITCHER

The final instalment of the staged drama *DFL* is set for an explosive ending at Ladies' Parlour on the West Hill on Saturday 3 May.

With romance, fights, flashbacks and the backdrop of Hastings' eventful calendar, *DFL* has followed ex-partners, Lydia and Noah, from the moment they unexpectedly bumped into one another after Lydia has moved to Hastings as a DFL or 'down from London.'

A loyal audience has built up from the first instalment on Pirate Day last year, and community remains at the heart of the Hastings Theatre Project (HTP). They have collectively welcomed over 1,000 attendees to their *DFL* performances, and over the course of the year they have used their profile to support local artists and champion theatre-making in the town. "The idea that both audiences and artists have responded to something long term has kept us going," says Dan, Artistic Co-Director of HTP.

Written by local playwright Nadine Passley, the ending of the six part romantic comedy has been influenced by its audience. "The play would not be ending how it is were it not for audience feedback ... because of the way people have engaged in the story," says Dan.

JUST COME ALONG

But you don't need to have come to the earlier parts of *DFL* to enjoy the finale. "We want to be really clear to our audience, for people who haven't seen any previous episodes, you can still come, and experience it as a one-off" says co-director Poppy Rowley. If audiences are keen to catch up, recaps are available on the HTP website.

Over the early May Bank Holiday weekend, Jack in the Green will be the backdrop to the final instalment. "Jack in the Green is about rebirth and renewal and looking forward to the year ahead. It feels like the ideal way of wrapping up this story ... to provide maybe a little bit of hope," Dan explains.

Alongside the final instalment, HTP will host a party to celebrate the end of *DFL*, to thank their audience and participants, and to discuss the future. "It will be a chance to celebrate that we've got to the end, to meet other creatives and just put a bit of a bow on the whole thing," Poppy says.

3 May at West Hill Community Centre from 5pm. Tickets are free and include a glass of wine.



Gilbert & Sullivan Gala 2025

JOHN RYCROFT

Gilbert and Sullivan are possibly the most famous musical partnership of all time. Their operatic creations have delighted audiences and performers worldwide for well over a century and continue to inspire new converts with each successive generation.

Over the last few decades, Opera South East have been performing whole works of Gilbert & Sullivan, most recently in April 2022 with a production of *The Mikado* at the White Rock Theatre. They have also given various recitals of excerpts from a wide range of G&S operas.

The chorus of OSE, and invited guests, unite in taking a musical journey through the topsy-turvy world of Gilbert & Sullivan at the end of April 2025. They will be performing locally over the space of

three consecutive nights. Among the many items featured in these performances will be those from *The Gondoliers*, *HMS Pinafore*, *The Mikado*, and *Pirates of Penzance*.

Conducted and directed by Marcio da Silva, appointed musical director of Opera South East in 2023 (who needs no introduction to local audiences), this mystical world of fun and frivolity will transport you. Come and enjoy an evening with Gilbert & Sullivan!



Tickets £15, ticketsource.co.uk/opera-south-east. Tickets may also be purchased directly from the venues,

both in advance and on the day of the performance. Friday 25 April: St Thomas the Martyr Church, Winchelsea Saturday 26: The Emmanuel Centre, Battle Sunday 27: St Peter's Church, Bexhill Start time for all three performances: 7.00pm



Héloïse Werner - Soprano and Composer

Saxony Blues

ELIZABETH ALLEN

Each performance in Max Baillie's programme of St Leonard's Concerts has offered a fascinating extension of musical possibility in terms of unusual instrumentation and juxtapositions of the familiar and the less familiar. Last week's *Saxony Blues* concert at Christ Church presented the strongest challenge yet to our preconceptions of a 'classical' concert.

Billed as 'new music for mixed ensemble straight from the Wigmore Hall', it certainly fulfilled what has sometimes been declared as the primary purpose of art: to defamiliarise, to make strange. In a recent Radio 3 interview, Max Baillie talked of his fascination with re-connecting music across times and genres, re-scoring and provoking unexpected responses.

This concert offered points of classical reference – a line of a Hildegard von Bingen composition, and T.S. Eliot's *Little Gidding's* use of the mediaeval mystic Julian of Norwich's famous assertion that "All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well." These, though, were presented in a context of all-new compositions by the ensemble: cellist Colin Alexander's *Moonrise/Alva's Riff*, Max Baillie's *Make Sweet Floods to Run*, percussionist Angela Wai Nok Hui's *Just let me die*.

When guest curator and soprano Heloise Warner sang lines from Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, these were deconstructed, reconstructed, made new. In his radio interview, Max Baillie suggested that it may help those of us with limited experience of more modern or experimental musical forms, to use visual images to engage. During the evening I found myself alternately mesmerised, intrigued, enchanted, baffled – and magicked into visions of skies and oceans. And once, in a probably less appropriate response, as the ensemble blew and threw a whole hail of cardboard whistles, mildly concerned about reuse and recycling.

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Oh Mykki, You're So Fine

NICK PELLING

The artist Mykki Blanco defies easy categorisation. I could shuffle and deal-poet, photographer, performer, glam-rapper, trans-gender activist and so on. But, let us leave labels to one side; Blanco is simply quite something. They have performed with all sorts of mega-stars, from Kanye West to Madonna and Michael Stipe. A few weeks ago, Mykki played a 'secret show' in Hastings. How on earth, you might be thinking, did this comet from some other non-binary universe pass through our seaside town?

The origin of the extraordinary gig itself is intriguing, but more of that later. The brilliant local musician Mike Willis kicked off the evening, at the *His Place* venue, with a set of his own Country-infused material, including *Let the Answer Come to You*, *Cold Kentucky Water* and the thought-provoking *Turtle on a Gatepost*. Mike brings a certain authenticity and warmth to everything he touches musically. He then took control of the turntable to support Mykki.

COME CLOSER HASTINGS

Mykki arrived on stage holding a large, bejewelled microphone, wearing what seemed to be a spangly leather waistcoat, filigree-grungy jeans and nothing on their feet. It was not, I guessed, a natural 'Mykki' audience: the age range was, to put it politely, wide. Mykki is used to big

venues but gave it everything, working the crowd brilliantly, emanating a writhing sort of electrical charge, drawing the crowd deeper into a conspiracy of truth.

The music itself was far more cleverly put together than the quick-fire rapping might suggest, and much of it was searingly political. Words and rhythms came flying at such a speed and with such emotional energy that it was very hard to pin it all down. Certain motifs seemed to recur but were then immediately subverted. A song about the murder of George Floyd had a fleeting, bitter touch of *Sweet Home Alabama*; while *Mr Sandman* riffed off the old song in all sorts of angular ways. Some of the politics is undiluted: at one point the crowd was joining in with the chant that "patriarchy creates climate change" and at another point the "colonial systems" embedded in modern life became, somehow, a source of enchantment. Holding this sort of stuff together, and keeping it from being too preachy, is surely Mykki's genre-blending sense of fun. Mykki has a sort of super-charged charisma, laced with glamour, anger, hilarity and melancholy that made the whole performance quite spell-binding.

GETTING IT ON

The background to the gig is worth explaining. As Mike Willis puts it, "it all came together quite organically, almost spontaneous." The primary initiator of this event was undoubtedly the remarkable Dan



NICK TUCKER

Demarre Meththananda, a relatively recent arrival in St Leonards, who has brought his own powerful energies to the art world here. Dan became friends with Mykki when they met at the Airwaves Festival in Reykjavik. Both artists share a multi-modal approach to art—and life. When Dan came to this town,

he conceived the idea that perhaps Mykki would agree to perform here. With the help of Mike Willis and several Hastings-based community groups and individuals—such as Katy Baird from Home Live Art, Catherine Wood from Tate Modern, Tess from Rock, Body Soul and all at Laundry Day—it was speedily

pulled together: Mykki would bring his subversive practice to the Church and Community hub *His Place* in Robertson Street.

It was a rare gig and, as such, a big, glitzy thank you to all involved. Mykki Blanco's latest album is Postcards from Italia mykkiblan.co



Hastings Comedy Festival Number 10

The Hastings Comedy Festival is back from 9 to 15 June, celebrating its 10th anniversary with an exciting lineup of performances across Hastings and St Leonards. This year's festival promises to be a vibrant mix of laughter and creativity, offering something for everyone—from stand-up comedy to comedy theatre, clowning, puppetry, and more. With a range of shows including tour performances, fringe previews, and exclusive work-in-progress shows, festival goers will experience the best of the comedy scene.

14 June will be a particular highlight, with the return of *Comedy for Kids* at The Observer Building and

the prestigious *Norman Award* newcomer competition at The Piper. Last year's winner, Lucas Jefcoate, will also perform his show at the Jenny Lind.

This year's festival features over 90 performances. They include Seann Walsh, Ria Lina, Joe Wells, Andy Parsons, Susie McCabe, Robin Ince, Arthur Smith, Kate Cheka, Jessica Fostekew, Alasdair Beckett-King, and many more, alongside local talents such as Sam Willet, Taz Long, and the improv group No Regrets.

Returning favourites include: Lucy Porter, The RH Experience, Jin Hao Li, Josh Baulf, The Embers Col-

lective, Shelf, and Tony Law. The festival also includes late-night comedy, a special festival edition of Hastings Live at Henry Ward Hall, and the return of Open Mic Saturday at Ye Olde Pump House.

A swathe of local venues will take part, including The Albion, The Observer Building, White Rock Studio, The Jenny Lind, Ye Olde Pump House, The Piper, The St Leonard, Oscar's in Warrior Square, The Electric Palace, East Hastings Angling Club, Sugarpie Honeybuns, The Good Place, and The Printworks.



Full listings and ticket information: hastingscomedyfestival.com. Also follow on Instagram, Facebook, X, and YouTube. Hastings Comedy Festival 2025 is sponsored by Lightning Fibre, with support from Love Hastings. Interested in volunteering? Contact festival directors Chris and Jake at hastingscomedyfestival@yahoo.com.

Mews News

VICTORIA KINGHAM

Those of you lamenting the sudden disappearance of the small museum *Bizarre But True* in St Andrews Mews will be pleased to know that there are plans afoot for something new and just as exciting. Indefatigable Dean Stalham, whose recent punk poetry evenings and film feature were successful new ventures, has recently signed the lease on the building that housed the erstwhile museum. He has partnered up with an American musician and entrepreneur, Patrick Lyons. They have big plans.

The building is conveniently painted black inside, with a recessed area which will serve as a small stage. The first job is to reconnect the electricity and supply some lighting, but after that there is not only space for an audience of at least fifty in front of the recessed stage, but also upstairs space for a small bar.

Frances Saunders will run his local radio station from there, as well as use it for his already-established drama and writing work-

shops for young people. Actors are interested in rehearsing and staging plays there: Francis' play *The Tenant*, which showed at The Stables some time ago, will be revived and improved and shown in that very interesting niche. Also discussed as a possibility in St Andrews Mews is using the area surrounded by the rather attractive balustrade, as an open-air, promenade-type theatre.

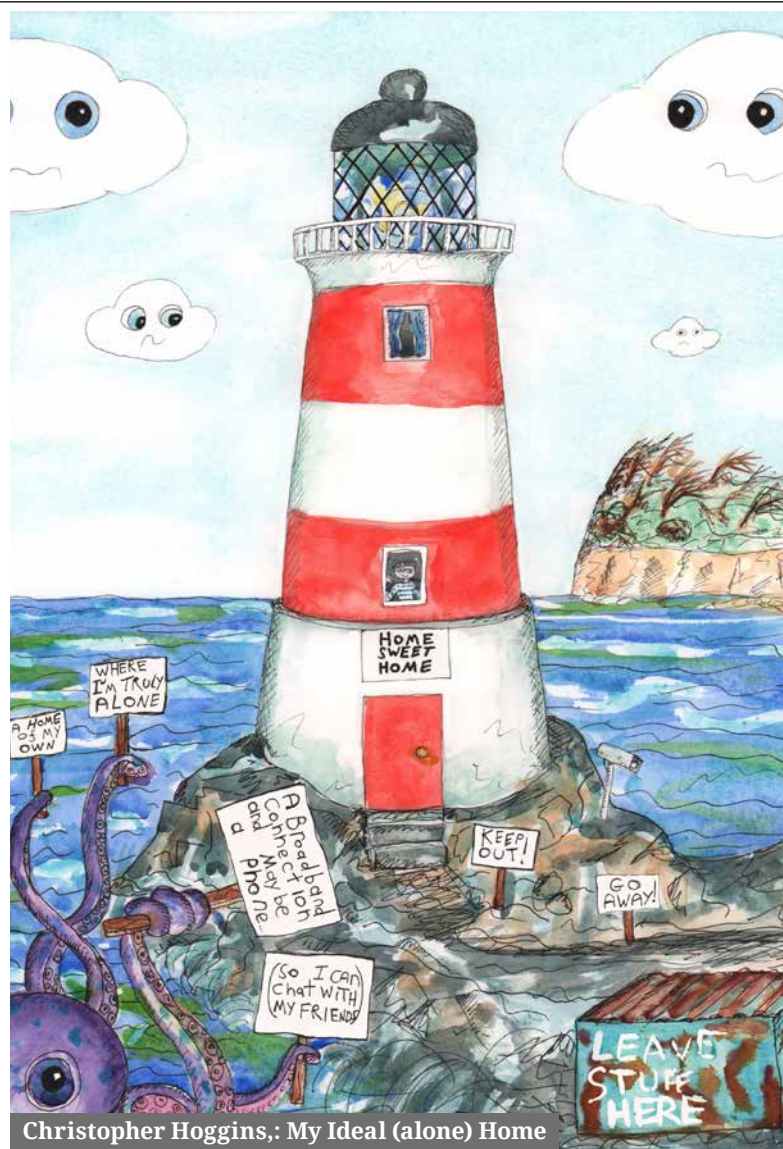
Patrick Lyons has been in the music business for over 50 years, and has discovered and nurtured many new talented bands and musicians. He will be overseeing the live music aspect of the venue, called MeU HQ.

If this is a fine summer, and if this project flowers as it should, then St Andrews Mews, already lively in the season, will become an active and vibrant hub at the bottom of Queens Road, helping to revitalise the area between Priory Meadow shopping centre and Bookbusters book shop. Looking forward to watching all this come to fruition.

MeU is a brand new community arts venue in St Andrews Mews, Waldegrave Road, Hastings. The venue will open on 27 April with Stretched Lips 3 – The best in punk poetry. Hosts will be Aaron Barschak and Penny Pepper. Tim Barlow and Patrick Lyons will be on the bill – pay what you can afford on the door.



Patrick Lyons



Christopher Hoggins: My Ideal (alone) Home

Local Artists Selected for National Touring Exhibition

Two artists from Hastings and St Leonards-On-Sea have had artwork selected for a high profile, upcoming national touring exhibition organised by award-winning arts charity, Outside In. They will have their work shown at Christie's in London and The New Art Gallery Walsall in the West Midlands.

Christopher Hoggins and Andrew Harston both submitted work for Outside In's *National Open Exhibition* following an open call last

year. The charity provides a platform for artists who face significant barriers to the art world due to health, disability, social circumstance and isolation. Its 7th *National Open Exhibition* has the theme of 'Shelter'. Eighty works were selected by a panel from over 600 submissions, and Christopher's and Andrew's work has now been selected for the exhibition tour.

Both artists have lived experience of homelessness and housing

problems. Andrew Harston found himself jobless, out of cash and broken down in his "rather poorly campervan" last year. "The council then wanted to move me on... the van was fine where it stood as long as I wasn't inside!" he recounts. These combined experiences led Andrew to turn to portraiture within the local community as a source of income.

Inside Out, the work Andrew submitted for this exhibition, groups together some of the portraits he has made during this time. "The plan was that each portrait I would do would be a part of a bigger piece, forming a sort of self-portrait reflecting on the need for community, my own place within it, and how we are all a part of each other's lives," he comments.

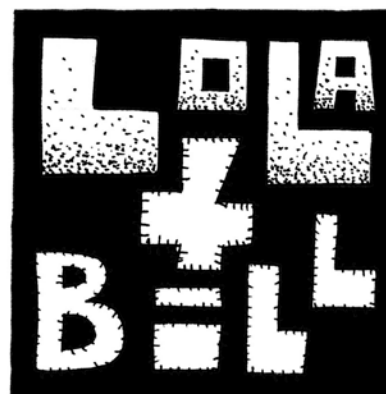
"The piece was originally intended to be made up of 1,000 individual portraits but, on reflection... it seemed more important to let things breathe! Though I'm still finding my way, portraiture allowed me to keep my home on the road, connect more deeply with so many more people and find some form of meaning and direction in life."

Christopher Hoggins submitted a work entitled *My Ideal (alone) Home* featuring his fantasy home – a lighthouse. "At the time I painted this I was being thrown out of my home of 13 years and had just discovered that I was autistic," he says. "I've always wanted to live somewhere isolated, and a lighthouse fits the bill perfectly!"

Chris has a distinctive style, and his cute, cartoonish Dweebing characters offer a catalyst for him to explore darker subjects: mental health, homelessness, poverty and autism. He has recently published two books, *The Illustrated Autist*, which concerns his own diagnosis of autism at age 50, and *I Dunno About Art (but I know what I like)*, an illustrated, tongue-in-cheek exploration of the history of art, made from his own unique perspective, including humorous reinterpretations of classics by Da Vinci, Hogarth, Monet, Hockney and Warhol.

Both artists stand a chance to win the exhibition's potentially life-changing first prize of a solo show. Outside In's last national open, *Humanity*, was won by another local artist, Michelle Roberts. The solo exhibition she won as a result is currently showing at the De La Warr Pavilion until 1 June.

Exhibition organisers: outsidein.org.uk Shelter will open at The New Art Gallery Walsall in the West Midlands from 27 June–19 October, then show at Christie's London from 12–22 January 2026. Andrew Harston can be contacted for private portrait commissions via his Instagram account @andrewharstonart. Christopher Hoggins' publications are available from his Etsy site Dweebings–Etsy UK, and more details of his art are at: instagram.com/chris_hoggins



BOOKBUSTER REVIEW

Practicing Social Ecology

By Eleanor Finley
Pluto, 2025, rrp £16.99
REVIEW BY TIM BARTON

It is increasingly obvious that global capitalism, in its industrial mode, is creating an environmental crisis of epic proportions. It is also apparent that the post-Thatcherism and post-Reaganomics mode of capitalism, one which is focussed on ‘financialisation’, is increasing the wealth of a tiny minority at the expense of everybody else, as it is essentially fed on debt, not production. Decades ago, visionary thinkers, such as Ivan Illich and Murray Bookchin, saw the broad outlines of our current crises coming.

In Bookchin’s case he developed a political philosophy based on attempting to ‘square the circle’ between socialist, ‘anarchist’, and ecological ideas. Like Rachel Carson, he was early amongst radical thinkers in seeing the extent to which environmental degradation was a threat to life on our planet. Unlike Carson, his political experiences in the 1950s meant he saw solutions that were not merely ‘instrumental’ tinkering, but that would attack the capitalist and industrial productivist behemoth at its roots.

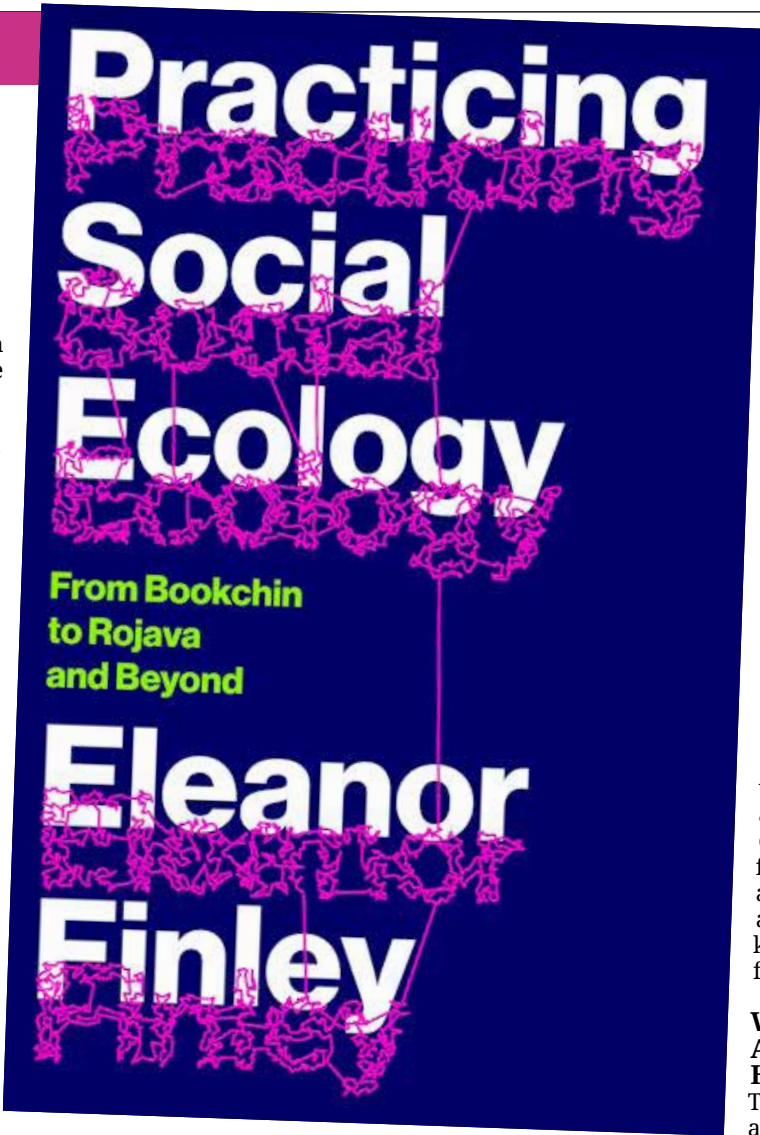
He named this ideology ‘social ecology’. Throughout his life, he amended the details as experience required. Much of his writing was focussed on critique of topical crises of the day, and on theoretical underpinnings to his ideas. But he also, and necessarily, was involved in real-world practice, and concerned with how to create new forms of po-

litical consociation that were compatible with a sustainable and liveable future society. Because, as we surely must admit by now, our current way of life is driving us off a cliff.

YOUR BOWELS WILL LOOSEN

This book, subtitled ‘From Bookchin to Rojava and Beyond’, is a welcome analysis of how the ideas central to ‘social ecology’, and thus central to our survival, have been expressed in the real world. Theory is all very well, but practice is where hope is forged. I have written here before about the Kurdish experiment in ‘socially ecological’ living. As with other areas on the periphery of the Western global hegemony, such as Bolivia, space has been, at least temporarily, available to experiment with Bookchin’s ideas. Within ‘developed’ nations there are fewer spaces to act, but the Occupy movement is one area in which Bookchinite ideas were able, in a few locations such as Oakland and New York, to flourish.

Primary among these ideas, and dating from his later writings, is ‘libertarian municipalism’, expressed in the ‘real world’ through



‘people’s assemblies’. Here in Hastings we have had a few attempts at creating such bodies. The idea would be to get as many local people as were interested and free to pop along to meetings where ideas can be shared and a consensus reached on actions. Optimally, decisions made would be able to be enacted. Town councils on a libertarian model find it hard to get traction where ‘representative’ councils exist, and even more so where these are embedded in local, county, and national bureaucracies. But their necessity is more apparent every day.

As is the necessity that discussions include as a core focus our relationship with the land. How much of our food is locally produced? How much is farmed in an

they were never easy, but dissolving local authorities and pushing the locus of power up to the level of county-wide or even larger ‘unitary boroughs’ will take what little autonomy Hastings has away from us. As Julia Hilton discussed in issue 273 of this paper, there may still be wiggle-room, but frankly right now is a ‘counter-revolutionary’ moment without the preceding ‘revolution’.

Meanwhile, Finley has found numerous examples of people-power, of eco-communities, directly democratic fora, and federalist alternatives to ‘nationalism’—in the best cases, based around ‘biomes’ and balanced ‘ecological footprints’. She says ‘there is no single blueprint for a democratic and ecological way of life. Indeed, if the last decades of

ecologically sustainable manner? How is it integrated with the natural world? How much of our energy provision is local, under our control, and genuinely sustainable in the long term? Think about such things for a minute and your bowels will loosen. By these measures, and many more, we are nowhere near any kind of self-sufficiency and have no resilience to global supply issues. So eco-communities, direct democracy, education that teaches us to think and analyse for ourselves and thus function as citizens, are a necessity if we are to address any kind of survivable future.

WHAT LITTLE AUTONOMY HASTINGS HAS

The role of popular assemblies is about to be challenged:

emancipatory social movements and democratic experimentation have revealed anything, it is that each community must reinvent real democracy for itself.’

Currently, the nationalist-populist far-right is on the ascendant all across ‘the West’, clearly including the UK. They offer ‘business as usual’ whilst promising a better life for those who will buy into their tacit promises to deal with structural problems that their leaders are getting rich from, in fact increasing. Any kind of solutions must come from elsewhere, though none can contain the enormity of what’s coming. Finley’s approach to the praxis of social ecology gives us a few clues. ‘Our task is not to rehabilitate the past but to move forward with lessons in hand’, lessons which clearly preclude the kind of ‘reforms’ promised by our parliamentary system, least of all ‘ReformUK’.

A RESILIENCE AND LOVE OF FREEDOM

Some of Bookchin’s ideas were predicated on us acting in sensible ways in order to head off problems that today are like a tsunami we’d seen on the horizon and ignored but that ‘suddenly’ is upon us. Thus, he may seem optimistic where, when I first read his work, in the early 1980s, his ideas seemed realistic, as well as necessary. He did warn us, over and over. I argued as early as 1990 that the narrow window of opportunity was closing fast. Once slammed shut, only bad options would remain. Now, in 2025, it appears all too likely that we have passed significant ‘tipping points’, ones that lock in horrific changes in our biosphere, that will crash our civilisation, create wars, famines, and disease, and trash yet more of the natural world that we are entirely dependent upon, no matter how alienated from it we may be in our current siloed way of living.

Real positive change at the local and regional level is more urgent than ever, to at least mitigate the worst of what is coming. Of those who are acting for positive change in the face of a new great depression, or worse, she says ‘their perseverance speaks to a resilience and love of freedom embedded in nature itself’.

POETRY CORNER

LIKE DEJA VU
OLI SPLEEN

The present I hold only in contempt
For it is now and now and always now
Whereas the past embroiders on itself
With recollection’s corners worn by time

The future holds its openness unwrit’
It is a breath that has yet to be breathed
Or that of death, to suffocate diseased
When what was planned reveals the opposite

Now’s sad stone certainty, I scrutinise
Whereas the times of joy just seemed to fleet
Sit back on life, relax and close your eyes
Until nostalgia brings life back, complete

CROSSWORD CORNER

Across

1. Supports seaside features (6)

3. Fashionable seabird on work experience (6)

4. Try end that is fashionable (6)

Down

1. Fast run south to produce newspaper (6)

2. Can sty turn out to be meagre? (6)

Crossword Solution: Answers on page 5 of The HIP List

1					2
3					
4					



Asparagus, crab and radish salad

This recipe is prepared over two days and includes candied flowers – if you’re feeling adventurous, give it a try!

Asparagus season is upon us and should be rejoiced for the next two months. I’ve paired it here with crab and a browned butter hollandaise, as well as a few easy-to-gather items, some of which will be growing in yours or a neighbour’s garden.

Whilst the spider crabs, for the local fisherfolk of Hastings, can be a bit of a menace, they are a regular catch, and really should be celebrated, so I encourage us all to get down to the huts and utilise these beauties. At the very least it will help pay for some net repairs!

Serves 4 as a starter or light lunch

INGREDIENTS

- For the salad*
- 400g asparagus
 - 500g white crab meat
 - 4/5 mixed radishes
 - 100g of peppery leaves like watercress
 - 20g samphire
 - violet/primrose/pansy/garlic

- heads
- 1 egg white
- 1 tsp caster sugar
- 1 tbsp mayonnaise
- 1 lemon, zest and juice
- a small amount of chopped garlic and ginger (optional)
- a selection of herbs from dill/chervil/flatleaf parsley/sorrel/chive

Brown butter hollandaise

- 1 tbsp white vinegar
- A of pinch of salt
- 1 egg yolk (use the whites for the crystalised flowers)
- 125g butter

Green oil

- herbs, blanched and frozen
- vegetable oil

METHOD

This recipe requires preparation a day in advance

Candied flowers

- The day before, candy the flowers. I used primrose and three-cornered leek from the

garden. Lightly whip the egg white, then add a splash of water and whisk again. It should be just frothing.

- Using a small, clean paint brush, coat the flower petals on both sides and sprinkle thoroughly with the caster sugar. Gently tap off any excess and lay on some parchment paper overnight.

Green oil

- Take your blanched and frozen herbs and place them in a blender with enough oil to cover and maybe a pinch of salt.
- Blitz on high for 1 or 2 minutes.
- Because you’re using frozen herbs, the oil will take on a whitish colour, but it prevents the herbs from turning brown and will recover a vibrant green as it comes back to room temperature.
- Then pass the oil through a fine sieve/tea strainer and leave to slowly drip through. You can leave this overnight in a cool spot.

Crab meat salad

- If buying fresh, just drop the spider crab claws into boiling water for 8 minutes, refresh in cold water, then crack and pick out the meat. Leave to cool.

- Alternatively, you can buy a dressed crab, or some picked white crab meat. You can, of course, buy some tinned crab lump meat. If using fresh, you’ll want to pick through the crab meat to make sure there’s no shell.
- Start by finely chopping your herbs, fold into the mayonnaise with the zest of a lemon and a small squeeze of juice, add your crab meat, optional garlic and ginger, and season to taste.
 - Thinly slice your mixed radishes, pick some peppery leaves and wash the samphire.

Hollandaise sauce

- For the hollandaise you will need to brown the butter over a medium heat for around 5 minutes until it takes on a biscuity smell.
- Remove from the heat and place into a jug for pouring.
- Heat some water in a pan and while it simmers, place a bowl over the top with a tablespoon of white vinegar and a pinch of salt. When the vinegar has warmed, drop in the egg yolk and whisk until it becomes light and frothy.
- Keep an eye out in case it

- overcooks. You can remove it from the heat and add a small splash of the hot water from the pan if it starts to dry out.
- Remove the whisked egg from the heat, placing it on a folded tea towel to prevent any slipping, and very slowly pour in the browned butter, in a thin stream, while whisking continuously until the butter is used up.
 - Cover and leave close to the stove for warmth.

Asparagus

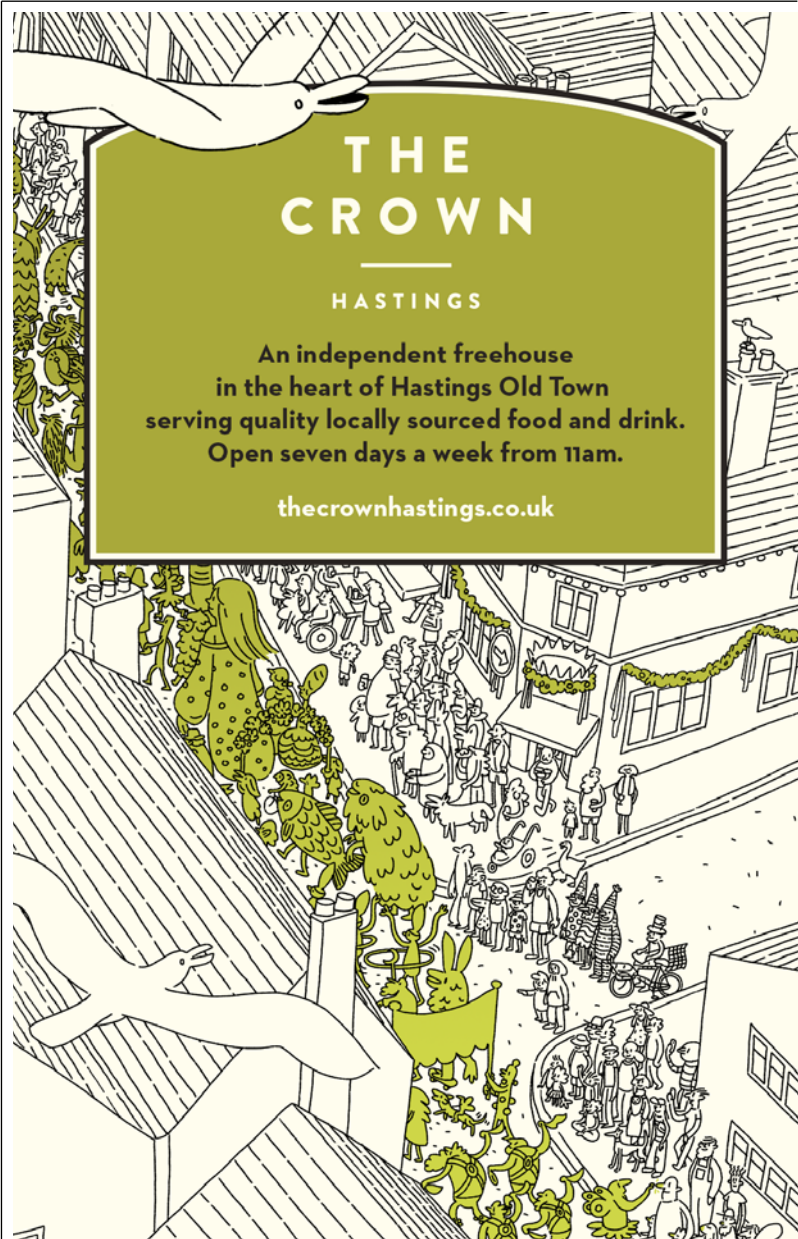
Blanch the trimmed asparagus in lightly salted water for 2 minutes, drain and ready your serving plates.

TO SERVE

Place your asparagus on serving plates, dollop around your dressed crab meat, place your leaves, radish and samphire, then coat everything in the hollandaise and garnish with your flowers, a few drops of your herb oil and any other herbs that remain.

CHEF RECOMMENDATION

Optional side of Jersey royal potatoes with salt flakes for dredging through the hollandaise makes a more substantial meal!





Marina Allotments



Margaret Blurton on her allotment

PHOTOS: EDWINA HUGHES

Allotment life – a lesson in patience

Edwina Hughes

As I write this piece, it's raining – we've been waiting for rain for a while. My friend and allotment holder, Stella, tells me this year has been about patiently waiting for the rain. Other years, she says you have to wait for the rain to stop or the soil to warm up, but this year, we're waiting for rain. It was the driest March on record and the farmer in me knows that not all rain is equally useful, this fine soft misty stuff needs a bit more umph to deliver impact to the soil; too much, though, and the land won't be able to soak it up and it'll just run off. So, I'm asking for something in between, on behalf of the allotment holders and more importantly the farmers.

The weather on the day I visit Marina Allotments is fine and dry. Stuart Balkam, the treasurer of the allotment committee shows me around. He's had an allotment on the site for three years and knows many of the people we meet on our tour. I'm immediately impressed to find a pizza oven and composting toilet on site as well as a number of shared resources like seeds, fencing and training materials. In fact, there's also a nut grove and hazel tree coppicing on site.

Marina Allotments is a wonderful place to spend some time. Each al-

lotment is distinct; some plots have raised beds carefully cleared and prepared for sowing, alongside others with overgrown runner bean plots mixed in with potatoes and wild flowers. At one point I notice a beautiful wrought iron bench that seems to be awaiting its next incarnation, and later I spot a front door too good for the tip but not quite useful at home. Apple trees and blackberry bushes are trained along fences and trellises and unruly rhubarb and chard flash their gorgeous, colourful legs at me as a wander past. I can see why people say gardening is good for your mental health, I'm already feeling more relaxed.

I am here to look around and I am also on the hunt for asparagus – asparagus is in season and features in this edition's accompanying asparagus, crab and radish salad recipe from Martin. The question is, if we source our crab from the local fish huts, can we hope to grow asparagus in our allotments? Let's find out.

Regardless of what you decide to plant, Stuart tells me that to maintain an average plot you need to spend about 6 hours a week across the year maintaining it. That adds up to a bit less in winter when everything is cut back and dormant and a lot more in spring and autumn for sowing and then harvesting.

There are fifteen allotment sites in the Borough of Hastings and St

Leonard's. The Council manages 600 allotment plots spread over thirty acres on thirteen sites. Marina Allotments' land is owned by Hastings Borough Council, but this one is self-managed by a committee and volunteers. It has just over 130 plots and most of these are four or five rods in size – that's approximately 125 sq metres, or about half the size of a tennis court. The plots were originally about double that size – the idea being a plot would be large enough to feed a family. Their use has evolved over time, thus the reduction in size. Half a tennis court of potatoes, veg and trees sounds doable and from a distance the plots look manageable and quaint. Closer up you sense the enormity of the work entailed in filling that space with something – flowers, vegetables, trees. It's possible to request a smaller plot to start with, but if you do get a large plot, there are many experienced allotment holders who can show you the ropes. That is, if you are lucky enough to be allocated a plot – right now the waiting list is over two years! So, the good news is that you have plenty of time to think about what you'd grow.

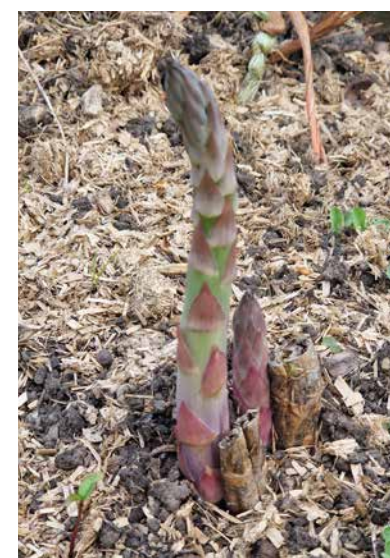
When I visit it's late Sunday afternoon a few gardeners are still here, digging, clearing, preparing. I see many signs of potatoes, leeks, broad beans, rhubarb and chard. Not so much evidence of asparagus being grown. But I am on a mission to find out more about our delicious featured vegetables. I want to know whether it is a viable allotment vegetable.

Lucky for me, Stuart planted some asparagus last year and can tell me more. I learned that while asparagus can be grown from seed it's often

grown from a crown – a spider web of roots that are sown in springtime. Crowns work hard but relatively quickly underground so that within a few weeks you may see a number of shoots poke up above ground level. In year one, they'll shoot up into long willowy stems with small buds at the top. These aren't suitable for eating. Stuart shows me these fragile willowy stems; they remind me of *Fresia* more than vegetable stalks. It turns out asparagus is a test in patience, and you may need to wait three or four years to get a good crop. Stuart intends to take his 15 – 20 stems and cut them back come autumn. He hopes that subsequent years may yield a more robust crop. I'm starting to think that asparagus might be a good metaphor for allotment life – growing it requires patience and a bit of luck.

Later on, I bump into Margaret Blurton who has had her allotment for a year and a half. Stuart tells me if there was a prize for the most transformed space, Margaret's plot would be in the running. Her allotment is teeming with life: there's plenty of potatoes, wild garlic, leeks and broad beans, and clouds of yellow hazy flowers – apparently the purple flowering broccoli got away from her, and these yellow flowers are the result. I might suggest some mistakes are meant to be – the bees are delighted with these pastel yellow buds that make up a glowing brush swaying gently in the breeze. On top of all that, we are in luck, as Margaret is also growing asparagus. This is her first year of growing asparagus and she's understandably underwhelmed with the result, Stuart is able to offer some consolation and advice.

If I'm honest, neither seem too bothered. Before I leave the allotment, we do find one bed with some more mature asparagus – this bed has several spears poking out from the soil, and the spears have all the right qualities – not too willowy and not very tall, but fat. Who knows if this crop will make the grade and all the way to a dinner plate this year? Time will tell. If not, there's always next year.



To find out more about the Marina Allotments visit their website marinaallotments.org.uk If you don't

want to wait years for your asparagus but want to purchase local stuff, try local grocers or South Brockwells Farm in Uckfield – they are famous for it. south-brockwellsfarm.com/asparagus

BASEBALL

PHOTOS: HASTINGS PIRATE



Outfielder Chris Cooper on strike

Pirates Pitch Up at Claremont

James Young

This summer, like last, a corner of Claremont School playing fields will echo on Sunday afternoons to an unfamiliar mix of sounds – the crack of bat on ball, but also cries of *ball!* and *strike!*, and the satisfying *thwock* of a line drive snared in a leather mitt.

Welcome to the world of Hastings

Pirates baseball club. There are no crowds here – sometimes, scarcely enough players, and rarely any money (the club's only income is from player subs and occasional funding). The noticeably sloping field is in need of upgrading, and the club has instituted a Crowdfunder campaign to help them build a new home plate and replace ageing safety and playing equipment. "You can't ask new players to turn up with a bat and a glove on their first day," says Pirates

General Manager Clive Raines, a garrulous Mancunian. But he also hopes to start a youth section to encourage more youngsters to give baseball a try – for which more equipment will be needed.

Results on the field haven't been too good: last year the Pirates finished bottom of the British Baseball Federation's Single A division, the lowest rung on the UK baseball ladder. Perhaps in keeping with their hometown's underdog spirit, the Pirates often feel like upstarts in comparison with better-heeled divisional rivals like the Guildford Millers or Kent Mariners.

Still, the team is grateful to Claremont School for giving them a home. "They've been really good to us. They could have turned us away like others have," says Raines. The club has an itinerant history – founded in 2017 as the South Coast Pirates, they've previously played at The Firs, the former home of St Leonards Stamcroft FC, and Bexhill 6th Form College's playing fields on Gunter Lane. And the Pirates came close to being wound up in 2023, when the club's founders departed, before a group of players decided to carry on, ditching the 'South Coast' moniker for 'Hastings' to align themselves more closely with their roots. A symbol of such hometown pride is the team's new alternate kit, green in homage to a certain Jack, and bearing the insignia RX in tribute to the Hastings fishing fleet.

MUCH DELIGHT

None of these challenges deter Raines or the rest of the team. Baseball in the UK is a labour of love, and there is much delight in playing the game – standing under a towering fly ball in the outfield, waiting for it to drop into your glove, the rare turning of a double play (two outs on a single play), the thrill of a strikeout



First baseman Rory Dearlove



Pitcher Uduak Victor Robert

or a late-inning, game-winning hit. More important than any of this, for a team that loses more often than it wins, is team spirit.

"Baseball seems to attract nice people," says second baseman Tim Whittlesea. "When I moved to Hastings I didn't know anybody. Now I know if my house gets damaged, or I need a place to stay, they'd be there for me." And these Pirates are an admirably diverse bunch. Single A baseball is open to all ages, and mixed-gender. "You can have a 16-year-old playing alongside a 65-year-old," says Raines, "and all but a couple of clubs have female players." One of those exceptions is the Pirates – something he hopes to change – but the team's official scorer is Gemma Cooper, accompanied to games by Lolly the greyhound, the club mascot. "It's a fun sport to watch," she says, "and if I get stuck (baseball scoring can be more complex than string theory), everybody helps me."

In keeping with baseball's multicultural traditions (many Major League Baseball stars are from Latin America or Japan), new Pirates Marhil Romano and Justin Lay are from the Philippines and the USA respectively, while loose-limbed pitcher Uduak Victor Robert was

born in Abuja, Nigeria.

As a child, Uduak was set to represent his country in the Little League World Championship in the US, before "politics and other factors" kept the team home. "I always dreamt of playing baseball outside Nigeria," he says. "Now I'm grateful to God for giving me the chance to play in the UK, many years later."

New faces are always welcome. "You don't have to be the fittest person on the planet," Raines says. "You can just turn up and play. It's open to everyone."

With another year's experience under their belts, and an influx of fresh talent, the Hastings Pirates have high hopes for the coming season. "We want to make a push for the post-season [divisional play-off in football terminology]," says Raines. "We've got the players." With a ballpark's worth of team spirit and determination the Pirates might just do it – and turn this corner of Claremont School into their slightly bumpy field of dreams.



The Hastings Pirates Crowdfunder can be found at crowdfunder.co.uk/p/hastings-field-of-dreams

FOOTBALL

Goal Drought Confirms Relegation

12 April

Canvey Island 1
Hastings Utd 0

19 April

Hastings Utd 0
Hashtag Utd 0

HUGH SULLIVAN



Ollie Black prepares another long throw

The relegation of Hastings United from the Isthmian Premier League back to its South-East Division was formally confirmed last Saturday when they failed to beat Essex visitors Hashtag United at the Pilot Field.

Having lost a crucial match 1-0 away at Canvey Island the previous Saturday, which assured the home

side of survival, the 'U's needed not only a win over Hashtag but simultaneous defeat for the only remaining team they could now overhaul, Dulwich Hamlet. The latter were, as it happened, playing at home to Canvey, and at halftime the news from South London was that Dulwich were a goal down. But despite

some near misses the 'U's could not conjure up any goals of their own in either half, while Dulwich scored twice in their second half to win 2-1 and render that failure academic.

On a dry pitch, with a high-bouncing ball and a swirling wind, the game in Hastings was fought with energy but little composure on either side. A sizeable crowd of over 1,100 urged the home side on and berated the referee for a perceived reluctance to penalise the visitors' physical approach, but few will have come with any anticipation of watching a beautiful game. Both sides resorted to long, high balls out of defence, leaving respective forwards to compete for scraps of possession. Passing moves were few and far between.

For the 'U's, Davide Rodari competed tirelessly in the role of out-numbered target man up front, but young wingers George Walker and Charlie Scarles made little headway, and the midfield (missing the injured Adam Lovatt) lacked any con-

trolling influence. Set pieces seemed the most likely source of a goal, either from Ollie Black's prodigious long throws or Freddie Legg's well-flighted corners, but although the ball bobbed on a few occasions in the crowded penalty area, no-one could apply a finishing touch.

Best moment in an increasingly desperate second half came when Rodari shuffled past a couple of defenders on the edge of the area and found space for a well-hit shot, but it went straight at the Hashtag goalkeeper, who saved comfortably.

The 0-0 final result extended Hastings' miserable goal drought: only 34 goals scored in 40 league matches this season, with just 12 in 21 since Christmas. Striker and captain Rodari has scored 22 league and cup goals overall. Net highest scorer over the season is Fin Chapman with six and Tommy Fagg with five.

The 'U's were back in action on Easter Monday at Dover and will play their last match of the season tomorrow (Saturday) at home to Potters Bar Town.

HASTINGS WAKE UP!



THE ALARM IS RINGING ON THE FUTURE OF HASTINGS, WHY ARE THE GREENS SO SUSPICIOUSLY QUIET?

Westminster is making sweeping changes to your local government that could see Hastings Borough Council abolished and replaced with rule from Lewes.

“This isn’t just a bureaucratic reform – it’s a battle for the soul of local democracy.”

Hastings Independent Councillors are accusing the local Green Party administration of failing to stand up for the town, instead using process and delay while the future is carved up behind closed doors.

Hastings, with one of the largest and most distinctive populations in the region, is being quietly ushered into a future it didn’t choose, with little public debate and even less political fight from those in charge.

“You would expect Hastings to be leading these conversations,” Hastings Independent councillor Nigel Sinden said. *“Instead, we’re hearing that it’s too soon to act, too complex to push back – a passive acceptance of a model that could erode local control for decades to come.”*

At the heart of the issue is the creation of another distant East Sussex-wide unitary authority, a single body to replace borough and district councils, centralising services and governance.

Two bold alternatives have already been proposed locally. Labour has called for a Coastal and Rural model that would unite communities facing similar challenges.

The Hastings Independents propose to retain Hastings as a unitary council committed to a federal model with other districts, and abolish East Sussex County Council.

This model will preserve local democracy in Hastings, and create savings by abolishing the expensive and bloated County Council. Hastings services should be delivered locally by people who understand and represent our unique town.

But instead of rallying around these ideas or presenting a unified local vision to central government, the Green leadership has been conspicuously quiet.

“If you were generous, you’d say this is the language of indecision,” said Hastings Independent Cllr John Cannan. *“If you were honest, you’d call it political surrender – a calculated silence from parties who think they’ll benefit from a county-wide power grab.”*

What can you do about it? Vote for the local Independent option when your council consultation letter arrives. Join us at our devolution meetings to spread the word.

Indeed, both the Green Party and the Conservatives are thought to support the county-wide model, seeing a larger authority as a potential political opportunity. This comes at the cost of losing the identity, influence and democratic voice of Hastings.

This frustration runs deeper than political rivalry. It reflects a growing fear that Hastings is being sleepwalked into a future designed by others – a one-size-fits-all governance model, delivered from Lewes or beyond, that won’t reflect the town’s history, its challenges, or its capacity for innovation.

The warning is clear: unless local Green leadership step up now, Hastings will lose not just its council – but its democratic agency, its local control, and its ability to shape a better deal for future generations.

Cllr Sinden added “This is more than a debate about structure. It’s a moment of reckoning for a town that has too often been left behind **This isn’t just a bureaucratic reform it’s a battle for the soul of local democracy!**”

For more information
about the Hastings Independent Group

