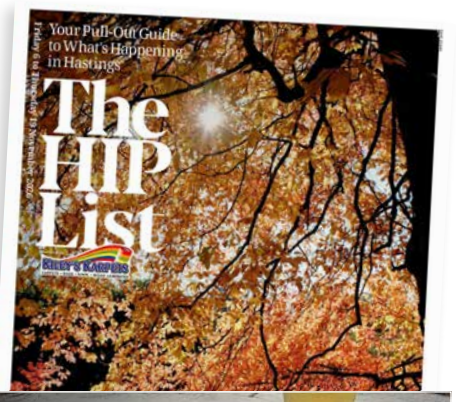
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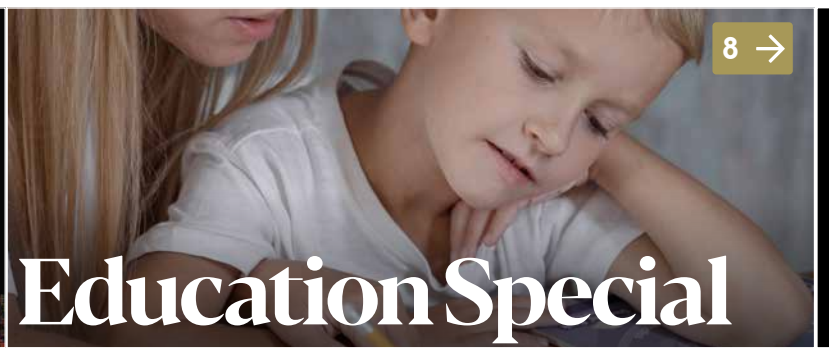
Inside:

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



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JASON ELLIS

When the Tide Turns

PAUL MCLAUGHLIN

Storms Austen and Boelo stripped away large sections of Pett Level's shingle beach defences last week, exposing for the first time in decades the old 1940s stepped concrete sea wall - and a tarmac service road that had been buried beneath tons of shingle. Near the grassy path on top of the sea wall, erosion has left a sheerfive-foot drop where the beach used to be. The storms brought heavy rain and gusts of 60–70mph and the powerful waves and high tides stripped shingle along the stretch from Pett Level to Winchelsea Beach and Cliff End.

Pett Level has long been vulnerable to coastal erosion, with its soft sandstone and clay cliffs under constant pressure from the sea. Storms Austen and Boelo pounded the limited sea defences and underscored just how fragile the area has become as climate change is expected to bring more frequent extreme weather.

The speed and full extent of the beach's disappearance has triggered significant concern among the local community and prompted formal requests for emergency government intervention - not merely to restore the shingle, but to fund permanent sea defences to protect homes and farmland from the impact of future storms.

The beach and its hinterland form part of the ecologically important Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay protected area, home to rare wildlife - and the loss of shoreline raises fresh concerns for these fragile habitats too.

The Pett Level coast is subject to natural longshore drift, whereby the sea carries shingle from one section of the Rye Bay beach and deposits it further east, towards Rye Harbour and Camber. Each winter, the Environment Agency uses a convoy of heavy lorries to return up to 80,000 tonnes of shingle and maintain the coastal defences. With climate change already affecting extreme weather patterns and expected to bring rising sea levels, however, these sea defences will need significant and costly upgrading to secure Pett Level's future.

The Environment Agency has a bulldozer in place and is expected to bring forward its annual 'shingle shuttle' from the second half of November, but this is unlikely to satisfy many people. Residents want permanent defences rather than a seasonal fix.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Beset by climate crisis-driven gales and the promise of more to follow, our lead story highlights the power of the sea to change a familiar coastline within hours.

At a time when it's easy to feel despair, Hastings community groups are working to create a better connected, scientifically informed and self-reliant response to climate resilience.

Active Hastings has long provided a positive approach to local health and well-being, with their GP link worker programmes proving particularly successful. You don't have to wait for a medical referral though; find their contact details in the Community section.

Balm for the soul might well come from Hastings Philharmonic Choir's forthcoming concert 'Songs of Light' in the atmospheric surroundings of All Saints Church, previewed extensively in the ever-eclectic Arts pages.

Our Education special report examines in depth the huge rise of home education in East Sussex, its successes, pitfalls and the malign legacy of Covid.

Expanding from a humble Bottle Alley hole in the wall to tables on the beach, The Selkie seafood bar has overcome bureaucratic obstacles and a catastrophic fire to become a beloved local foodie institution. Read the full story in this issue.

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News

The End is Near

PAUL MCLAUGHLIN

After much uncertainty and a large dollop of incompetence, it now looks as if Hastings Borough Council will be abolished in 2029, after all.

The Minister for Local Government, Devolution and Regional Growth, Jim McMahon, told MPs last Thursday (29 October) that after "careful consideration", the government is now "minded" to proceed with the plans to streamline local government structures in East Sussex and in Brighton and Hove, but with some modifications to the proposed boundaries.

Under the plans, East Sussex County Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council and Rother District Council will form a new East Sussex Unitary Authority responsible for the provision of all council services.



The proposed boundary changes will see East Saltdean, Telscombe Cliffs and Peacehaven move from Lewes District to an expanded Brighton and Hove City Council. The parish of Falmer, which was also wanted by Brighton, will, however, remain part of East Sussex.

The announcement is part of the government's wider devolution programme. Jim McMahon reaffirmed the government's commitment to shift power out of Westminster and to "give local leaders, local councils and local communities the tools to shape their own future." He expressed confidence that the "decisions taken now will be the building blocks for how this country is governed for generations to come."

There will now be a period of at least three weeks for further representations before final decisions are taken. If the changes are confirmed, local elections will go ahead across East Sussex (but not for Hastings Borough Council) in May 2027 on existing council boundaries. New councils will then be established for 2029, with elections to shadow councils in May 2028.

East Sussex will receive £450,000 from the government's £63 million capacity fund to cover costs incurred in implementing reorganisation. The funding will be paid in the coming weeks, with the remaining balance paid after final decisions.

Emergency Closure of West Hill Lift

The West Hill Lift has been closed for essential surveys and repairs. Hastings Borough Council could not provide a timeline for when it will reopen, due to the nature of the works.

The funicular railway opened in 1891 and retains its original wooden Victorian coaches. It runs through a tunnel, which makes maintenance particularly difficult.

The West Hill Lift is one of the town's crown jewels and a popular tourist attraction, giving visitors spectacular scenic views stretching round to Beachy Head in the west and out across the English Channel.

A Hastings Borough Council spokesperson apologised for the inconvenience and said the council will provide an update when more information is available.

HASTINGS TIDES

DATE	HIGH AND LOW TIDES				SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON
FRI 6 NOV	L 3:19	H 8:49	L 15:46	H 21:22	6:58	16:42	
SAT 7 NOV	L 4:11	H 9:35	L 16:34	H 22:01	6:59	16:22	
SUN 8 NOV	L 4:55	H 10:13	L 17:16	H 22:35	7:01	16:21	
MON 9 NOV	L 5:33	H 10:47	L 17:50	H 23:07	7:03	16:19	NEW
TUES 10 NOV	L 6:03	H 11:20	L 18:16	H 23:38	7:05	16:18	
WEDS 11 NOV	L 6:25	H 11:52	L 18:36		7:06	16:16	
THURS 12 NOV	H 0:09	L 6:47	H 12:24	L 19:01	7:08	16:15	
FRI 13 NOV	H 0:39	L 7:17	H 12:55	L 19:33	7:10	16:13	
SAT 14 NOV	H 1:09	L 7:52	H 13:26	L 20:10	7:11	16:12	
SUN 15 NOV	H 1:42	L 8:32	H 14:02	L 20:52	7:13	16:11	
MON 16 NOV	H 2:20	L 9:17	H 14:47	L 21:40	7:15	16:09	
TUES 17 NOV	H 3:15	L 10:12	H 16:02	L 22:40	7:16	16:08	FIRST
WEDS 18 NOV	H 4:43	L 11:19	H 17:32	L 23:52	7:18	16:07	
THURS 19 NOV	H 5:59	L 12:32	H 18:35		7:20	16:06	

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PAUL MCLAUGHLIN

Hastings Castle Gets Urgent Repairs Boost

Hastings Borough Council (HBC) has been awarded £288,500 from Historic England's Heritage at Risk Capital Fund to carry out urgent conservation work at Hastings Castle. The funding, combined with £200,000 from the council, will allow repairs including stabilising vulnerable sections of the curtain walls, conserving the tower wall, chapel arch and Collegiate Church remains, and repairing the Ladies' Parlour Wall. The work will also address vegetation, masonry defects and other vulnerable historic features at the monument.

Cllr Julia Hilton, the HBC Deputy Leader and lead councillor for shaping place, regeneration and community wealth building, welcomed the funding announcement, saying the money would "help complete some urgently needed conservation repair work to the site, while permissions for the wider Town Deal funded project are going through the processes. This work is needed, she added, "to protect the castle, which is a scheduled monument, and also protect the public who are visiting the site."

The Heritage at Risk Capital Fund supports urgent repairs and regeneration of historic buildings at risk, particularly in deprived areas, aligning with government priorities on community wellbeing, economic growth and levelling up.

Can the Local Plan go Further?

JAMES PRENTICE

Hastings' housing crisis is well-known, with temporary accommodation use more than doubling in five years from 240 to 631. A primary cause is the rapid rise in housing costs, coupled with the cost-of-living surge and stagnating wages, leaving many unable to find anywhere affordable – and thereby effectively homeless.

The council is legally required to assess and, where legally obliged, support these people. This puts Hastings Borough Council (HBC) under severe financial strain. HBC is buying properties at market rate to boost temporary accommodation stock, costing taxpayers millions – a situation that is not financially sustainable without building new social units.

Government research shows Hastings has persistent and increasing poverty, driven mainly by a lack of access to affordable housing. Failing to build more affordable homes will not only weaken HBC's finances but keep relative poverty stubbornly high.

With the Local Plan in its final consultation stage, it is timely to ask whether it can go further. The debate is often framed around geography preventing further building – an approach that the plan appears to follow. It asserts that many areas cannot be developed due to existing high density and geographic constraints (the sea and the Country Park). This approach is underpinned by a density survey by London consultancy Allies and Morrison which cost HBC £51,885.

Their analysis results in the Plan meeting only 27% of the town's assessed housing needs – just 181 homes per year to 2041 – continuing the Borough's trend of being among the five worst performers in England for housebuilding. Yet is the density report right? Can the Plan be more innovative?

Crucially, the report fails to acknowledge that Hastings is not very densely populated. Office of National Statistics data shows it is less dense than Worthing, Brighton, Southend and Blackpool. The report also misses many small developable plots within dense areas, because it used a broad approach rather than surveying the town.

Local research shows more ambitious targets are possible. By using small, inefficiently used sites within built-up areas with little ecological value, more housing could be generated without damaging the environment or building on controversial greenfield sites.

Analysis indicates smaller sites could provide over 1000 additional homes beyond the Plan, with up to another 300 from very small sites (under 0.25 hectares). Converting inefficiently used employment zones into mixed-use areas could yield 200 more units, empty retail units 300 more, and retrofitting large empty properties another 300. There are of course broader planning considerations to utilise such sites for housing.

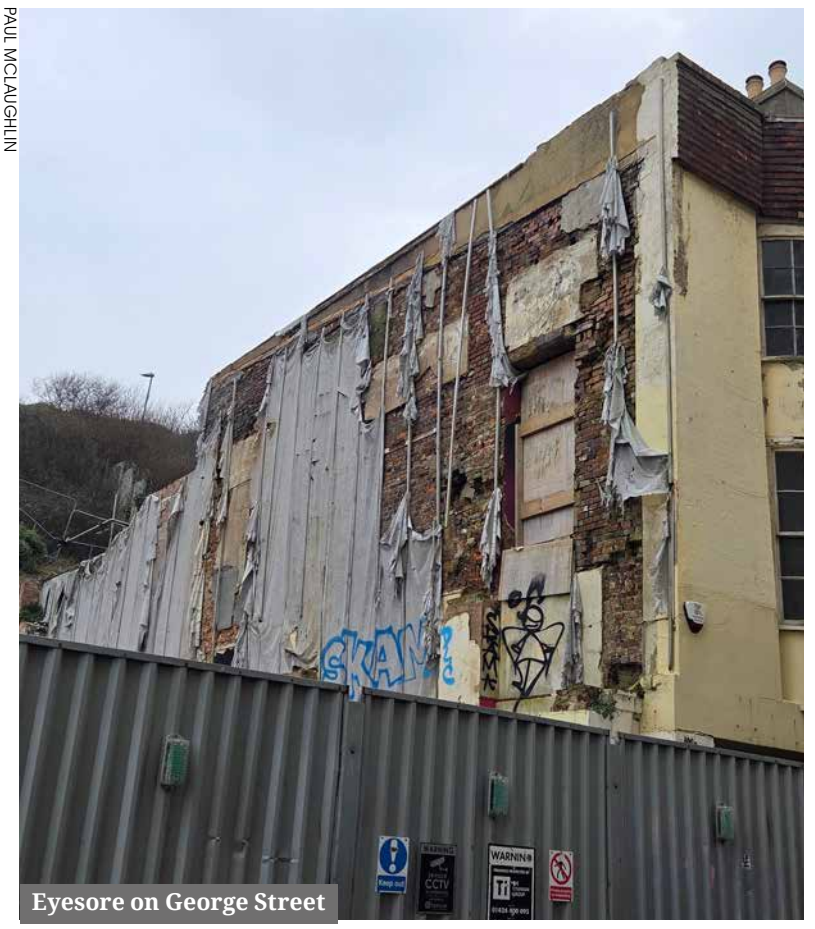
Collectively, this could produce 2,423 additional units not in the Local Plan – housing an estimated 3,300 people. If 30% were social or affordable (727 units for an estimated 990 people), this would provide enough housing for all 631 households currently in temporary accommodation.

Without more ambitious targets, HBC's finances will continue to be consumed by housing demands. The financial and social case is clear: the Local Plan must go further by being more innovative and ambitious.

Disclaimer – This research is not commenting on any one councillor, local party or its policy regarding the Local Plan.

Eyesore Plans Finally Approved

PAUL MCLAUGHLIN



Eyesore on George Street

Plans to redevelop 39-41 George Street in the Old Town have finally been approved by Hastings Borough Council. The former nightclub and amusement arcade was destroyed by fire in January 2023, and the site has been left derelict ever since.

The site has drawn criticism from residents, who have labelled it an "eyesore" and raised safety concerns over an unstable wall and hoardings that have blown down in high winds. In March, the council announced enforcement action against owners, Oasis Developments, issuing a Section 215 notice requiring landowners to clean up the site. The notice remains in force until the council is satisfied that the site has been brought up to an acceptable standard.

Oasis Developments Hastings Ltd was granted permission to redevelop the site on 22 October. The plans make provision for 14 residential flats, six holiday lets and four commercial units. They also include the partial demolition of the listed building at 41 George Street, with the existing building façade retained.

Planning approval was granted on the condition that construction work begins within two years. However, the company has not given a timeline for when the work will start.

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

#Letter

TOWN DEAL INTEREST BLACK HOLE



Cllr Darren Mackenzie

JOHN COLE PHOTOGRAPHY

Dear HIP,
I write in response to the article *Town Deal Interest Black Hole*, published on 8 October.

The funding received by Hastings Borough Council through the Town Deal programme has been managed in accordance with government guidance and the council's Treasury Management Policy throughout.

When the funding was awarded in 2021, councils were not required to separately identify, ringfence or report any interest earned on Town Deal funding. As a result, these funds were managed in the same way as other council grants and cash balances through normal treasury management arrangements.

It is therefore not possible to retrospectively identify a precise amount of interest attributable solely to Town Deal funding. All Town Deal funding received, spent and held has been fully accounted for and reported in line with government requirements.

The council has provided regular financial reports to both government and the Town Deal Board throughout the programme, while remaining focused on delivering investment and regeneration projects for Hastings.

As part of our continuing commitment to transparency, the remaining Town Deal funds have now been transferred into a separate account so that any future interest earned can be clearly identified and reported. This is not because of any issue with how the funding was previously managed, but because we are always looking at ways to improve transparency and public reporting.

More recent government funding programmes include specific requirements regarding the treatment of interest, and where those requirements apply, the council follows them.

Town Deal funding has been managed in accordance with the rules that applied when it was awarded, all programme funding remains fully accounted for, and the additional steps now being taken will provide even greater transparency in future.

Cllr Darren Mackenzie,
lead councillor for Finance, IT, Risk and Assets

We would love to hear from you.

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REBECCA SINKER



Community Focused: Watching the PEB film at the Observer Building in August

A Hastings Community of Resilience

DR REBECCA SINKER

"This is the least extreme climate you will experience in your lifetime."

That was the warning from Prof. Hayley Fowler, delivered in the People's Emergency Briefing (PEB) film screened for the first time in Hastings in August at the Observer Building. The question on the table: How resilient is Hastings?

On the evidence of this summer, not very. Five heatwaves. Wildfires encroaching on neighbouring towns. July the driest on record, and drought persisting despite recent rainstorms – all against eye-watering costs of food and fuel.

IT'S NOT ONE DAY, IT'S NOW

Hastings Mayor Paula Warne posted after the screening: "We are in a climate emergency and it's not 'one day', it's now. We're seeing flooding like never before, we're seeing wildfires on our doorstep – and when I say on our doorstep I mean Telham in Battle, Abbotswood in Eastbourne. We need to make changes to our daily lives and we are going to have to adapt to a different climate because it feels now like there's no going back."

El Niño, the natural sea-surface temperature rise in the east Pacific, is forecast to reach unprecedented levels this year. At home, frequent storms are forecast, while friends and family across the globe will suffer heatwaves, drought and typhoons that drastically affect world harvests and essential goods supply chains.

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY BRIEFING?

The PEB film builds on the first National Emergency Briefing in Westminster (November 2025), where 1,200 MPs, faith leaders and sector leaders heard experts in nine fields explain how a heating climate will affect health, national security, nature, food production and the economy. The film presents edited extracts intercut with public responses, talking to Chris Packham. With over 5,000 community screenings nationwide, the goal now is a TV broadcast to the nation.

HOLDING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

More than 500 people have seen the film at screenings in Ore, Old Town and St Leonards. Attendees from organisations already doing vital local work included Energise Sussex Coast, Hastings Voluntary Action, Hastings Emergency Action Response Team, Hastings Area Southern Housing Tenants Association, Hastings Aging Network, Safe Havens, Clean Water Action Group and Hastings Community of Sanctuary. Local MP Helena Dollimore, councillors, faith leaders and emergency service officers also attended.

The MP for Hastings and Rye said: "The learnings from the briefing are clear and make me very concerned. We are living it now with our fourth heatwave this summer. Our reservoirs are drying up and I am worried about the risk of more water outages. I'm also very concerned about the possibility of wildfires."

The film presents stark truths but is not without hope, offering changes we can still enact to curb the worst effects.

NEXT STEPS TO ACTION

Under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004), The Sussex Resilience Forum, which includes the emergency services, utilities, Red Cross, ESCC and all borough councils, have drawn up emergency response plans. A determined online search uncovers this information.

But Hastings also needs a resilience network addressing adaptation for extreme heat, floods or drought, food self-sufficiency, health and renewable energy at community level. It must be locally focused and inclusive, drawing on lived experience and grasping the particular needs, challenges and opportunities in our area to develop coordinated, practical local resilience measures.

The common thread through all the PEB conversations was the need for a more connected, self-reliant and prepared local community. As Jane Ripley noted: "There is a strong community here in Hastings and people will step into the breach as we saw in Covid." The climate crisis affects us all, but not equally – some are and will be harder hit, so we must act collectively now.

Our volunteer-led Hastings PEB Group (NEBHastings@proton.me) is holding a follow-up event on November 8, open to anyone who has seen the film and who wants to help organise a resilience network. Book here: tickettailor.com/events/nebhastings/2486104 If you agree the PEB should be broadcast in a televised briefing to the nation, please write to our MP: helena.dollimore.mp@parliament.uk

EDUCATE AND ORGANISE

Environmental scientist and educator Jane Ripley leads Standing Up for Nature and teaches healthcare undergraduates at East Sussex College:
"I don't feel the communities here are well enough prepared. We're on the frontline because the heat comes up through continental Europe. We're coastal, so sea-level rise and flooding impact our communities first and the ecology is changing here already. And in this town we're something of an island of deprivation in the South East's sea of relative affluence. Infrastructure is creaking. We have a lot of old housing stock ill-equipped for heat or damp and many people in Hastings already live paycheck to paycheck.

"Governing bodies must supply the resources we need to look after each other. On a basic level, they must maintain our current infrastructure, keeping the drains cleared to prevent flooding and not building on the greenspaces needed to soak up excess water, not to mention protecting essential biodiversity – because no pollinators, no crops!"

Leah Perris manages Hastings Youth Commons Youth Club (ages 11–19). She attended August's event and plans a youth-led screening with other local youth services:
"We did a session with Nature Bites two years ago and there was loads of wildlife round here that they noted. But the young people only found half of that this year. Our green spaces are disappearing and that is impacting our young people, but what can they do?

"Who is going to be building and supporting our communities? Our young people are the ones that will have to be fighting for Hastings, St Leonards, their homes, local areas and wards in the future. Right now, those wards don't have many voices, and if we can get our young people involved, I hope they can be that voice for change."

Leo Cacciatore is the East Sussex representative of the Fire Brigade Union (FBU):
"In the heat this summer we were much busier: lightning strikes, property fires, wildfires – and some large-scale incidents too, like the train derailment. There are fewer of us than there were 15 years ago: since 2011 we've lost 100 full-time and 100 on-call firefighters. So we were working harder for longer hours, under more strain. We need more firefighters, better wildfire training, new equipment, safe crewing levels. Because I don't think we've seen the worst of this.

"I spoke with people at the screening about their worries and concerns – not about raising panic, but taking it seriously. We definitely need more preparedness and joined-up planning. Local people need a say in what goes on. FBU would welcome funding going into communities to enable them to be prepared, looked after and supported."



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Active Hastings: Linking the Community to Activity

FIONA MCGARRY



In 2022, Active Hastings created a specialised 'Link Worker' role for someone to work with Hastings residents who have long-term health conditions to help them become more active.

The role bridges the gap between healthcare and community-based activity. It was originally funded by Hastings and St Leonards Primary Care Network (PCN) through to 2026 and is delivered in partnership with Hastings Borough Council and East Sussex County Council.

The key to the success of the Link Worker programme is the simplified referral system, which enables health professionals to easily connect people with physical activity opportunities without needing detailed knowledge of every available service.

Unlike many referral systems that direct individuals to a single activity or organisation, a referral to Active Hastings provides access to a wide range of activity opportunities across Hastings. This allows the Link Worker to identify the most appropriate activities for each patient based on their individual needs and circumstances.

Local GP Link Worker Jas spends time out in the community, delivering talks and interactive sessions to groups to raise awareness of the benefits of physical activity, and encouraging people to get involved. She says: "Physical activity isn't just about fitness. It's a vital part of managing long-term health conditions. We see time and time again how the right support, at the right time, can help people regain confidence, reduce symptoms, and improve their overall quality of life. It's about meeting people where they are and helping them take that first step."

Jas works with people who are referred by their GP, social prescribers, healthcare professionals, community groups, or those who have self-referred. She provides tailored support, matching them with suitable activities and services. One success story is a 56-year-old woman living with chronic back pain who felt disconnected from activities she had previously enjoyed. Through chair-based yoga and water-based rehabilitation sessions, she is now able to enjoy regular yoga sessions having reduced her pain levels, which has improved her outlook on life.

Work has also been done to address local need – where there is a gap in provision of certain sessions, new ones have been introduced, including chair-based yoga, seated strength sessions and gym and circuit sessions for people with neurological conditions. Jas has also helped to set up 'safe' exercise spaces for women.

One couple who have benefitted from group classes and personal training sessions with Jas say: "She's been a godsend – we're so grateful to her. She's knowledgeable about our various medical conditions and pushes us to do our best! Her positivity and encouragement, her humour and understanding are exactly the tonic that we need. My husband will be 80 in a few months, and we can honestly say that Jas has helped us to keep active and to live as healthily as we can these past seven years. We look forward to seeing her every week."

Cllr Glenn Haffenden, leader of the council and lead councillor for sport and leisure, says that Jas "does an amazing job linking up all the different agencies who work with patients and residents, and getting the best health outcomes for them.

"If you have on-going health concerns, I'd encourage you to speak to your GP and see if there's something out there that could help you."

Find out more at hastings.gov.uk/sport_play/getactive/AH-case-studies/gp-link-worker-case-study/

Warming Up the Other Band

LEE HILL



The Other Band at Barnaby's

COURTESY OF THE OTHER BAND

Warming up the Homeless is an award-winning, registered front-line charity supporting homeless people on the South Coast from Hastings to Eastbourne and surrounding areas. The charity has been operating since 2015. It supports over 1,400 men, women and children a week, acting as a conduit between the raw edge of homelessness and statutory agencies, providing daily outreach support, food banks and welfare advocacy.

The Other Band are local musicians playing an eclectic mix of Americana from many different decades. They have been playing for over a dozen years and built up a loyal fan base. The band consists of Julian Graff (mandolin, guitar and vocals), Lee Hill (guitar, harmonica and vocals) and frequent guest musicians, Dave Fricker (bass) and Stu Alexander (accordion).

After the band made a couple of CDs, they hit on the idea of offering their CDs to audiences free - but encouraging them to donate to Warming up the Homeless. This has proved very successful and is mutually rewarding: The Other Band gets their music heard and the charity benefits from the donations. Around £3,000 has been raised in the last couple of years thanks to the generosity of audiences. Particular mention should go to The Albatross Club in Bexhill and Barnaby's Lounge in Hastings who have been unfailing in their support, promoting both Warming up the Homeless and The Other Band.

To find out about upcoming gigs and sample their music, go to The Other Band's Facebook page: theotherbandhastings. Contact Lee Hill with any enquiries about the band: email leehill50@hotmail.com or mobile 07767132941 Warming up the Homeless may be contacted at 01424 888138 Hastings or 01424 552929 Bexhill





Late veteran Bryan Hunter and Helena Dollimore MP at last year's Poppy Appeal stand

Remembrance Day and the Poppy Appeal

Helena Dollimore, MP for Hastings, Rye and the villages, this week joined veterans and volunteers for the launch of the Hastings & St Leonards 2026 Poppy Appeal in Tesco, raising money for veterans and their families.

Local veteran Bryan Hunter was due to receive an award at the launch in recognition of his 35 years of dedicated fundraising, staffing the Tesco stall every year without a single day off during the poppy appeal period. Sadly, Bryan passed away just days earlier. To customers of Tesco, Bryan was a familiar face every year in the run-up to Remembrance Sunday and will be sorely missed. His sons attended the launch event to accept the award on behalf of their father.

Last year the Hastings & St Leonards Poppy Appeal raised a whopping £66,808 for the Royal British Legion.

Helena Dollimore said: "It was an honour to join the launch of the Hastings and St Leonards Poppy Appeal today and pay tribute to all the local veterans and volunteers who make it happen each year. We also remembered Bryan, a stalwart of our community who dedicated himself to the poppy appeal every year and will be so missed. Thank you to all the volunteers who give up their time to raise this money for such an important cause, I would encourage everyone to stop by one of their stands or volunteer to help out."

The annual Act of Remembrance to commemorate and remember those lost in conflict will be taking place at the war memorial in Alexandra Park at 11am on Sunday 8 November.

At 10.40am, the Civic Parade with organisations and uniformed groups will make its way from the Town Hall, along Queens Road, towards the park. There will be a service, wreath laying and a march past, then the Parade will re-form and make its way back to the Town Hall.

The Veterans Hub in Roberson Street will be open to all for a social gathering following the event. The lights in Bottle Alley will be red, the colour of poppies, in honour of Remembrance Day.

I'll Swim to France 3: When the Student is Ready

SARAH MILNE

October has been a huge month in my journey towards swimming the Channel. It began with an endurance training camp in Dover with The King's Swimmers. The camp showed me just how much I still need to learn – from improving my stroke and feeding efficiently to understanding the importance of selecting the right crew, because my swim (and even my life) could depend on their actions. It was also life changing. Swimming back and forth from the famous Swimmer's Beach to the ferry port wall, following in the wake of so many great Channel swimmers, was a powerful experience. I came away feeling different, as though something almost magical had happened and I had truly become a trainee Channel swimmer.

They say, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear."

On our last night, Kevin Murphy – one of The King's Swimmers' directors and coaches, and the 'King of the Channel' – spoke about each swimmer's achievements and goals. When he got to me, I jumped in before he could finish. "I know. I have a lot of work to do."

He agreed. But also acknowledged that I arrived at camp with little endurance swimming experience and no big swims under my belt. By the end of the week, I had swum 35 kilometres from nothing and completed my longest swims so far.

Yes, there was work to do. But Kevin told me that he and the team believed I could do it – that I could swim the Channel solo in 2028.

I can't quite explain what it meant to hear that from people who know the Channel so well. Their belief in me has made me believe in myself, and I'm determined to prove them right. Kevin offered to write my weekly training plans, and I will return to Dover to train whenever I can. I couldn't be more ready to learn from someone who understands what this challenge demands.



Dee Thorogood of Fish 2 Water giving encouragement at the end of a 5K swim

My new plans build on what we achieved at camp. I'm now in my second week of longer pool sessions three times a week, alongside back-to-back endurance swims at weekends, ideally in cold open water. My old routine of squeezing weekday swims into a long lunch break no longer works. My days now start at 5.30am, either to fit in two hours in the pool before work or to get organised and properly fuelled for weekend swims. It's a big adjustment, but having a plan and someone so experienced to guide me is a powerful motivator.

Kevin isn't the only teacher who has appeared at just the right time. My journey is being shaped by a growing number of coaches and fellow swimmers. Back in May, I hadn't swum proper front crawl in years, let alone in the sea. That was when I discovered Fish 2 Water open-water training in Eastbourne. Dee helped me find my feet in the sea and develop my stroke. As my confidence grew, I joined her club for regular coached swims. I also joined Hastings Seagulls Masters, where coach Mike is helping me get faster and stronger. Both clubs have given me a wonderful community of swimmers who share their experience and encourage me to push myself.

The teachers were always there. I just had to be ready to take the plunge.

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HOME EDUCATION SPECIAL

Huge Rise in Home Education

This HIP Special Report examines the factors fuelling the rapid growth in Elective Home Education and asks whether parents are given sufficient support when the school system is failing increasing numbers of children. We have contributions from teachers, educationalists, psychologists, health writers and, of course, parents. First, KENT BARKER puts the latest statistics into context.



Government and County Council figures have shown a massive increase in the number of school-aged pupils currently in Elective Home Education (EHE) – that's to say not attending a school and apparently choosing to be taught at home.

In East Sussex in the 2022/3 academic year, 1,520 were being educated at home. But in the most recent year for which figures are available, 2024/5, that number had risen to 2,500, an increase of 64% – nearly two thirds. It is much higher than the national average which shows an increase of just 12.8% – from 111,700 in 2024/5 to 126,000 in the current year.

"Operating within limited resources, many schools no longer have the capacity to cater for children whose abilities, interests or development do not fit neatly into a standard model," says journalist and Home Education specialist Ginny Smith.

When HIP started to report on the growing trend a year ago, a teacher and therapist who asked to remain anonymous told us: "For some families, it's a lifestyle and a philosophy. For others, it's the result of system failure. And for many, it's neither planned nor wanted, but simply the only option left when school does not work for their child."

A Hastings teacher who also asked us not to use his name points to factors other than lifestyle and philosophy to help explain the increase: "EBSA (emotionally based school avoidance) is often for anxiety, trauma, identity issues, medical, autism or other reasons and feeds into the decision to withdraw a child from school."

It is remarkably easy to take your child out of school and embark on EHE. You simply inform the headteacher. The Local Education Authority – in Hastings' case East Sussex County Council – should assign an Elective Home Education Support and Advice Officer to home educating parents. But it's not uncommon for parents to refuse them access. The officers have no right of entry to a home, they cannot enforce a specific national curriculum, timetable or teaching method, and parents are under no obligation to respond to their enquiries. However, if the local authority believes that the home education is not suitable, it is possible for them to take further action by issuing a notice under the 1996 Education Act, demanding evidence that a child is receiving 'suitable education'. They can also give a School Attendance Order (SAO) or, as a last resort, seek an Education Supervision Order (ESO) in the court. All of these sanctions also apply to children simply failing to attend school.

Ultimately, parents can be fined for absenting their children from school if they don't provide them with alternative structured learning – but that is an increasingly controversial sanction.

How Home Ed Can be Abused

The problem with any discussion of 'Elective Home Education' as the profession calls it, is that most people focus only on the 30 or so pecent whom the experts call 'lifestyle/philosophical home educators': families that often have the resources – money, time, skills – forgetting that the more pressing issue is the remainder of EHE children, 'school-failure / crisis-driven home educators', removed from school due to unmet SEND needs, mental health/anxiety, school bullying or other reasons, including, shockingly, a local secondary school who 'encouraged' a large group to home educate, presumably to improve the school's Progress 8 scores (the GCSE-based measure of a school's success used by the government).

Many professional educators are worried that EHE is abused for all sorts of reasons. The local authority cannot prevent a family from taking a child out of school and cannot apply any capacity assessment of the family's ability to educate a child until age 16.

EHE has exploded, as has EBSA – 'emotionally based school avoidance' – often for anxiety, trauma, identity issues, medical, neurodiversity or other reasons. EBSA often feeds into EHE. For families who do not have wealth, teaching skills, or time, EHE can mean neglect, further social isolation, lack of education, boredom, getting sucked into online worlds, some toxic, endless gaming and it exacerbates the issues they are already dealing with.

Meanwhile, under the same label of 'home education' are the very many who have been pushed out of mainstream schools for being 'difficult' or 'unlikely to get the school good Progress 8 scores – the 'value-added' accountability measure used by the government to evaluate the effectiveness of secondary schools by comparing pupils' GCSE results to their prior achievement at primary school. For most of them, 'home ed' actually means lack of provision and is sometimes used as cover for family neglect and abuse. If abuse or active neglect is suspected, then overstretched social services are called in.

Focusing on the more affluent means that the real issues of SEND, neglect and social isolation are not being addressed.

A Hastings Teacher

Snapshots of Home Education

The home-education community in and around Hastings is becoming increasingly visible. Families choose home education for many different reasons. Some are looking for flexibility or a more individual approach to learning; others might find that a conventional school environment does not meet their child's educational, emotional or additional needs.

Home education doesn't necessarily mean learning alone at home. Hastings and the surrounding area have plenty to offer home-educated children and young people, including its coastline and countryside, museums, galleries, libraries, historic spaces, community organisations as well as a growing number of specialist classes and activities.

I have created and now run a photography course for local home-educated children. As I get to know my students, I'm continually struck by what strong, curious and wonderfully individual young people they are.

As the world changes, it's becoming clearer that no single approach to education will suit every young



TIMA MIROSHNICHENKO/PEXELS

Special Needs Support Curtailed

I completely understand why parents choose to take their kids out of school. In Hastings, the vast majority of people who decide to home school have kids who struggled in school for one reason or another. Often there are SEND (Special Educational Needs) issues that are just not being supported. In our school we do have a sort of facility for our most high needs students, but staffing has been drastically reduced. We used to have a lot more capacity in the mainstream for a lot more smaller groups with more members of staff and with teaching assistants, but that no longer really exists.

Sometimes things can get really tricky in terms of friendships so I know parents have pulled their kids out for that reason.

Hastings Secondary School Teacher

When Home Ed Works

I chose to take my now 11-year-old son Barry out of mainstream primary schooling because he was not coping. He was too young for the age group he was placed in, and the classes were too large. It was just post Covid and he'd been at home for a year during lockdown. To be at home solidly for a year and be expected to go straight back just didn't work for him. The stress it created was enormous.

I think home education has been absolutely the best thing for this child. I think he needed a different learning pace, which cannot be given in state schools because children like Barry need a lot more downtime – time off so that they can process information. Being home educated gives him the chance to say "I need more sleep and I need time." Then you watch the learning actually happen.

I read the curriculum to see what he would be doing at school because I didn't know it, so I did give myself a head start. I thought it would be really structured and we would do this on this day, that on that day, but it just didn't work that way. What I needed to do was to adapt to his rhythm and learn what worked for him, which took about three months. To begin with we did nothing. Then we slowly introduced maths workbooks, then English and science workbooks, and he did them at his own pace. Then I let boredom set in, and he started asking to do things, so it was his choice.

It's very easy to take your child out of mainstream schooling. All you have to do is tell the headteacher that you will be electively home educating and the school has to do all the legwork and let the Education Authority know. Then you are contacted annually. I've got an LA – an elective home education support and advice officer. They come and report on what your child is learning and how effective it is. So different families can do it differently. I invite the LA to our home and we sit for a couple of hours and go through the work Barry has done, and we talk about what he does and doesn't do, what he enjoys and what he doesn't. If the Elective Home Ed team don't feel it's enough, then they can come for an enforcement visit. A lot of families are very distrustful of them, which I think is a shame because they are a really good resource.

Carol, my daughter, who's 13, chose to go back into mainstream schooling herself because she is highly sociable. With home ed, it's hard to have a social group where you're regularly seeing people and spending time with your cohort. What she gains from school is the feeling of belonging, but her grades have slipped since she's gone back. They gave her initial exams to find out her level and she scored really highly. Then after six months being at that school, she got lower scores.

I don't believe in standardised testing. I think it's really bad for children's self-esteem. But if they wanted to sit a test, I would say OK, how can I support you? Barry has spoken about it and we've looked at Plumpton college, which takes home-educated children for GCSEs – I think there's a similar one in Northiam. They get a college-style version of the GCSE in the core subjects, and they have to go to lessons before sitting the exams.

Carol wanted to do an early GCSE in textiles recently, and it would have cost us £1,000 just to do the two exams, plus course fees. Doing it independently costs £500 per exam and most of the time you have to go to London as you can't sit them locally.

It costs a lot to educate a child at home. There are textbooks and other resources to buy, and trips out or sessions at collaborative learning centres like Imaginarium in Lewes. I think home education is massively under-resourced and, at the very least, parents should be able to access funds equivalent to what it would have cost for their children to go to a conventional state school.

Julia and her family are former Hastings residents who now live near Lewes. Names have been changed.

person. In the students I've met, I see a strong inner compass: they are eager to identify their individual strengths, supported by parents who encourage and help them navigate their way. Perhaps this growing community is the beginning of something important – not a rejection of other ways of learning, but a reminder that education can take many forms and that every child deserves the opportunity to find the one in which they can thrive.

Kate Butts

I struggled at school, and being at home has helped me become more confident and expressive. I feel much more supported at home, learn at my own pace and can focus on topics that I really like. The best part, though, is that it's fun. There isn't a typical home-ed day because it could include anything. After breakfast, my brother and I do some schoolwork, such as Maths and English. Lunch is my favourite time! We have a more relaxed afternoon. We might do science experiments, play with Lego, make art, go to the park or watch a documentary. We watched a live lesson with my hero Steve Backshall, (naturalist, explorer and author), the other day. We also choose a topic that lasts a few weeks and do a little bit of it each day.

Student A

There's no typical day in home ed. I started in Year 5 because I never really enjoyed school. It was an amazing decision for me. I often go into Hastings for clubs and experiences. I really like photography as it's broadened my skills and understanding of my camera. I've always loved taking photos of nature. I've also made great friends who share my interest in photography. Another club home education introduced me to is sea fishing with EHSAA and Brian Pask. I also went on a fossil hunt at Bexhill. It was very interesting as I learnt a lot about geology and the history of the land. Hastings is a great place for home ed opportunities. I've improved my skills across a wide variety of subjects, including woodworking, photography, karate, climbing, camping and survival skills, swimming, Shakespeare, history, D&D, science and plenty of time in nature.

Student B

"Home ed isn't for everyone. There are days when I doubt my ability and look around my house and see the piles of washing, hoovering that needs doing and the dishwasher that needs emptying. But then my son will pick up a book without being asked to, will sit and draw, or want to help to cook dinner. My children have learned to work at their own pace, to explore their interests, and become more confident in their abilities. They focus on the things that are important to them and have thrived doing so."

Home Educating mother Abi.

The Covid Legacy

SUSAN MCFIE

The Covid lockdown experience left many children anxious and traumatised, particularly those that had just begun their primary education. UK schools closed in March 2020 and only began to reopen in the summer. Parks, playgrounds and activity centres were closed. Visiting friends or relatives was not allowed.

When children returned to school it was a different place. Masks had to be worn in areas where children normally gathered. In primary schools masks were not mandatory, but some schools did ask very young children to wear them. Teachers were also required to wear masks, making their job far more challenging. There was widespread reporting of children regressing to nursery behaviours including loss of language and going back into nappies.

The whole scenario was repeated when schools shut down again in January and were not reopened till early March. The experience of bouncing between the new dystopian-style schooling and the boredom and loneliness of a highly restricted home-life had a damaging impact on mental health for many children. For many, school now represented a scary and unsafe place.

The Covid-19 Inquiry found: "Many children experienced heightened anxiety...some developing extreme issues with school, food and pandemic-related fears leading to obsessive behaviours including handwashing..." The inquiry also found that many children were now suffering from "Post-viral conditions" including Long Covid Families that were already coping with special needs and/or disability now had worsening mental health and a new chronic illness thrown into the mix.

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Songs of Light at All Saints Church

GARETH SIMPSON AND VERA BELL

PETER MOULD



Hastings Philharmonic Choir's next concert, *Songs of Light*, features two sublime choral works, Schubert's *Mass in G* and Saint-Saëns's *Oratorio de Noël* (Christmas Oratorio). The choir (which this year has expanded to over 90 singers) will be joined by soloists Beth Yates and Helen May (sopranos), Kerry Gentleman (contralto), John Twitchen (tenor), and Geoff Williams (baritone). They will be accompanied by the strings of Hastings Philharmonic Orchestra, and conducted by Marcio da Silva.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) and Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) were both young men – 18 and 23 respectively – when they wrote the works in this programme. Schubert composed the *Mass in G*, the second of his six masses, in a mere six days in early March 1815, for church use in Vienna. It is a compact, lyrical and melodic setting for soprano, tenor and bass soloists, choir, strings and organ. Schubert died aged just 31, leaving behind him a huge volume of compositions, having at the age of 8 clearly marked himself out among family, friends, and musical associates as a genius. (There's an outstanding 1986 series about his life, if you care to find it online, called *Notturno – Mit meinen heißen Tränen* – it stays with you).

Saint-Saëns' *Oratorio de Noël* was also completed at speed – in less than a fortnight – ahead of its first performance at La Madeleine in Paris (where he was organist) on 24 December 1858. Its ten movements draw on a range of Biblical texts to narrate the traditional Christmas story and to reflect upon its meaning and significance. It is a work of high contrasts, in which grandly declamatory and turbulent passages add drama to its otherwise subdued and lyrical mood. Organ and harp feature prominently in the accompaniment.

TWENTIETH CENTURY MODERNISM

To complete this very attractive programme with 20th-century music, Boyan Ivanov and Elin Samuel will join the orchestra as soloists. Ivanov (a *very* fine clarinettist, principal clarinet for the Hastings Philharmonic), will play Copland's dreamy, and quintessentially American Modernist, *Clarinet Concerto*. The first movement is searingly melodic, with jazz-inspired rhythms and harmonies. Like George Gershwin, also the son of Jewish immigrants, Copland (whose father changed the family name from Kaplan) was brought up in Brooklyn. He was also extremely close to Leonard Bernstein for over 50 years. It has been written of Copland, and others, that like African-Americans, Jewish Americans are "dispossessed people who have become, in a cosmopolitan urban society, representative of man's uprootedness." Nevertheless, his aim was to write wholly and specifically American music, and his works have become, (as has Gershwin's and Bernstein's), inextricably associated with the land and people of America.

There's something about harp music, whatever period and whatever genre, that pulls at your insides; it's surely no accident that we talk about heartstrings. Debussy, feeling the instrument's emotional potential, created some of the most iconic harp pieces of the 20th century. Virtuoso Welsh-born Elin Samuel, one of the UK's leading proponents, will play his evocative *Danses Sacrées et Profane*. Incredibly, this beautiful, short, but seminal piece was written in 1904; significant modernity is often way ahead of its popular recognition.

This is an unmissable concert for lovers of classical music, and another triumph for the continuously developing Hastings Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra. Get a ticket in time for this Saturday, if you haven't already.

All Saints Church, All Saints St, Hastings. Saturday 7 November, 7.00pm. Tickets: hastingsphilchoir.org.uk/autumnconcert2026 or at The Bookkeeper, Kings Road, or Book Buster, Queens Road. New choir members are welcome: email info@hastingsphilchoir.org. Schubert series: youtube.com/watch?v=ZeonjQ4KHmw&t=806s

COURTESY OF GILLESPIE AND MONTAGUE



Sarah Gillespie and Chris Montague

Eclecticism Rocks at 74 Norman Road

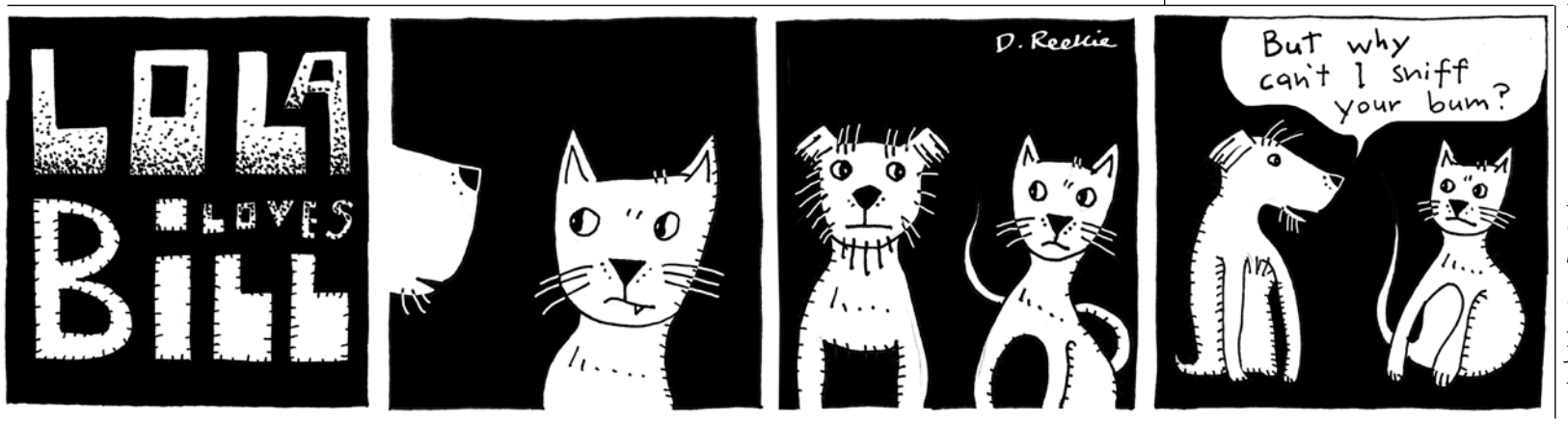
Sarah Gillespie and Chris Montague will perform together at Mike's in St Leonards on 7 November. Following a run of intimate duo performances in California, they retreated to a cottage on the shores of Loch Fyne, Scotland, to record a new stripped-back duo album.

Montague, from Gateshead, is a guitarist whose technique has been compared to that of John McLaughlin. Whether or not anybody can be compared to that legend, Montague's technical skill is exceptional and his approach to the instrument is unique. There's a beautiful solo track that he recorded for a Radio 3 jazz session (url at the end of this article). His musical experience spans a wide range from his own bands and collaborators to classical music performances. He is also a professor of music at the Royal Academy.

Drawing on folk, Americana, blues and Beat-inspired poetry, Sarah Gillespie's songs combine sharp observation with lyrical storytelling. A published poet whose songwriting has drawn comparisons with Bob Dylan, Gillespie is known for her incisive writing, wry humour and compelling live performances. She has led her own quintet for maybe 14 years, and performed widely – often at jazz venues (including Ronnie Scott's and the 606 Club).

The gig is part of an extended album launch tour through Britain and the USA. The first pre-release single is *18th Holy Curse*, and there's a live preview on YouTube. All URLs below. This promises to be an excellent gig from two immensely talented performers. The venue at 74 Norman Road is small, so if you haven't yet bought a ticket, do so before Saturday.

Chris Montague and Sarah Gillespie will perform as a duo at Mike's place, 74 Norman Road, St Leonards on 7 November, at 8.00pm. Doors open at 7.30pm. Tickets: mikeslist.uk/product/sarah-gillespie-chris-montague/. Preview of duo: youtube.com/watch?v=umbMBCbLSvQ. Montague solo for Radio 3: youtube.com/watch?v=IQ-2CLsLT-BE. sarahgillespie.com chrismontaguemusic.com



Life, Love, Song

VICTORIA KINGHAM



PETER MOULD

Harling talks to her father on the tree phone

Earlier this year we saw Bev Lee Harling's work about her father's final years performed in St John's Church Hall at St Leonards. Six months or so later, a new, polished, and streamlined version of this unique presentation played for two nights at The Stables as part of Hastings' Storytelling Festival.

The title has changed – *Hey Good Lookin'* was a working title, and also the title of one of Bev's father's favourite songs. The show has been retitled *Things I Know and Things I Don't* – a line from one of Harling's own songs about the realisation and final acceptance that, dancing with her father towards the end of his life, she could only relate to him in terms of the present.

This performance was slicker, streamlined: every moment considered and employed – the new back projections (shadow cutouts – the shadows of what were once memories) carefully placed so that they appeared to the audience within the curve of the lovely tree of life. The order of songs was changed a little, and full use was made of the additional excellent sound facilities of The Stables.

What struck me, perhaps even more than before, was the expression of absolute and unconditional love between Harling and her father. It's not something you often sense on stage over and above the clichés and the sometimes sentimental connotations, and to be honest I'm not sure how it becomes apparent (and when I think about performative expressions of love the one that comes immediately to mind is between the protagonists of *Colin From Accounts*. Clearly, that's a digression, but it's something to do with the depth of their communication). But the love is there – between Harling and every memory she relates of her unseen father, and in the very musical connection between her and her partner Frank Moon. Her own songs are skillfully interspersed with songs that her father loved and could still remember even when he no longer remembered whether he'd had dinner, so that the whole thing becomes one – one relationship between father and daughter, one life.

Things I Know and Things I Don't showed at The Stables on 23 and 24 October. There are plans to take it on tour nationally. Full details of cast, crew, and sponsors at stablestheatre.co.uk/things-i-know-and-things-i-dont



COURTESY OF LEIGH DYER

Leigh Dyer with Fins

Leigh Dyer at Sea

VICTORIA KINGHAM

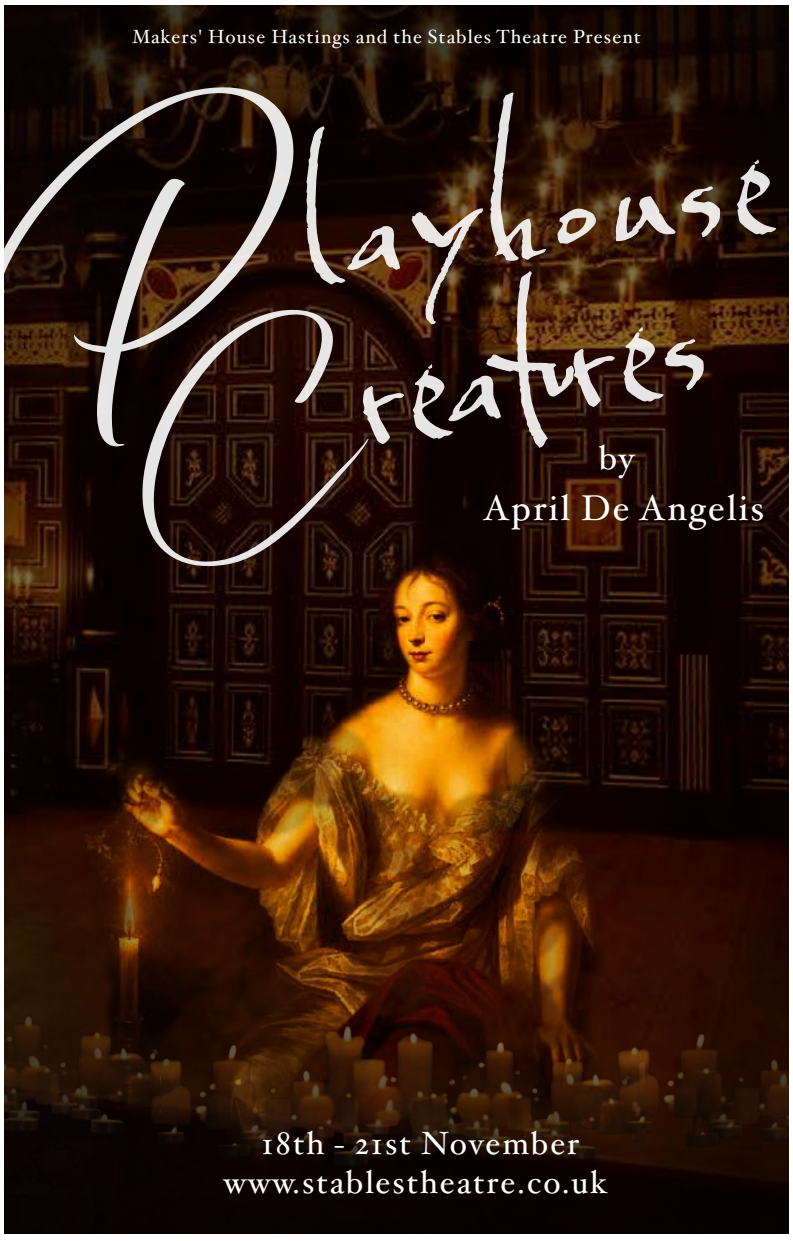
Having seen and appreciated Bev Harling's memory tree, it was interesting to discover a little more about Leigh Dyer, the sculptor whose metal works are so much part of the character of the Hastings and St Leonards area. He made the commemorative winkle on Winkle Island, the Bale House Canopy at Hastings Country Park, the eerie shiny snakes that hug the outsized chess pieces in George Street, and the boat sculpture sunk into Pelham Beach. Harling particularly appreciated how close Dyer was to her father, who owned the metal foundry in Ivyhouse Lane.

An 'art gallery gift shop' on George Street, At Sea, opened in July this year at 52 George Street, has managed a coup. Dyer's work, not generally made for public sale, is on display there, among that of a carefully-chosen group of painters and sculptors.

The artists represented are mainly Sussex-based and include Ben Fenton (whose Bottle Alley works are the subject of a current BBC documentary), Fiona Brown (whose internationally exhibited work uses boat-building materials), Samantha Guertin (RSMA exhibited), Glyndebourne resident artist Julian Sutherland-Beatson, Peter Quinnell, Daxa Parmar, Carrie Warrior, James MacKinnon (also featured in this newspaper), Drew Copus (mural artist, featured here two years ago), Phil Hannath, Jacqui Summerfield, Jed Boyle, Sassy Luke, and Richard Elliott. Gallery owner Amy Walker hopes that their gallery can become part of the larger collective, Own Art, which allows clients to buy original art on interest-free credit terms over the course of ten months.

Twelve steel fins by Dyer, made of crib steel and about a foot high, have been presented for sale. "I want the work I make in Hastings to help people see the beauty of the place, perhaps with fresh eyes," he states. "From the Marina, the mussel shells made with Sarah Evans, Peter Quinnell and local school kids, to the Dirty Old Town sign on Russell Court that casts a shadow, I hope people might stop to think about the environment the work is in. I like to move forward, making new stuff informed by previous pieces. The fins were enjoyable to make and have sold quickly, I'll no doubt be making a new edition soon."

At Sea: 52 George Street, Old Town: atsea.studio. Leigh Dyer instagram: instagram.com/leigh_dyer. Drew Copus: tinyurl.com/4wrpa2xw. James McKinnon: tinyurl.com/James-MacKinnon-Feature.





COPYRIGHT TOM HUNTER, 1997

Woman Reading a Possession Order (after Vermeer)



GARY WILLIS FOR PHOTOHASTINGS

Tom Hunter in front of his current exhibition photo at Electro Studios

The Paradox of Political Art

VICTORIA KINGHAM reflects on Tom Hunter's talk for PhotoHastings and the continuing significance of his work

It was heartening to see that during the worst excesses of Storm Boelo ravaging the seafront and blowing chairs across the beach, large numbers of Hastings' best photographers and other interested people gathered together in Electro Studios the other day to hear one of the country's more eminent practitioners, Tom Hunter, in conversation with Alexander Brattell.

They weren't disappointed. Hunter is affectionately human (and quite sweary) and though he must be well practised by now at talking about himself and his work, he was thoroughly engaging for an hour and a half. Living most of his adult life in Hackney, he was a member of a squatters' collective that became a housing association that successfully campaigned to save a whole street from demolition in the eighties; coming up with Punk and Rock Against Racism, he's the epitome of late-20th-century protest.

OLD MASTERS, NEW EXPRESSION

Even if you're only passively interested in photography you'll probably have seen his seminal work *Woman Reading a Possession Order (1997)*. Many of his photos before and since are staged in homage to old masters and it's a technique and a careful method that has brought him accolades. "I'm so slow and so useless that I've just stuck in the way that I've been working for 40 years," he laughs. Ironically, since his photos have now been exhibited in most of the major galleries across the world, successfully crossing an establishment boundary between 'high' art and the art of photography.

"So you consciously used the language of painting, as the pictorialists did, with the visual style of modernism in what A.D. Coleman called the directorial mode, in order to publicise the situation your neighbours were in, being at risk of eviction," commented Brattell. Some of the success of Hunter's work lies in its continuing and unmistakable political content. As part of the successful Hackney protest, he expanded:

"I wanted to elevate my neighbourhood so that we had a chance of keeping our community, keeping the houses. So I borrowed the mannerisms and the visual language of Vermeer. I thought the Dutch were very important during the golden age of Dutch painting, the way that they were the first to illustrate the ordinary people of Holland."

But the photographs are not merely staged representations; they are almost all portraits, planned over days of getting to know his subjects and their back story. He makes them as large as possible, often printed on tin. The large photo in the current PhotoHastings show is just one part of a whole project photographing cab drivers. All were born outside the UK, mostly refugees, and as he learnt their stories and their hopes for the future, he posed them in local landscapes in imitation of some of the 19th-century paintings in Hastings Museum. Further impressed by the wondrous and ornate Durbar Hall, he also placed people from ex-colonial countries back in this transplanted, deeply neo-colonial environment.

ART AND POLITICS

The dignity and significance lent to his subjects by their Old Masters staging has been extremely successful and has gained him national recognition. Hunter is in part, like Nigel Kennedy or Jamie Oliver or Jean-Michel Basquiat, a product of the successful institutionalisation of the radical by the capitalist class. This isn't to denigrate his work at all, rather the opposite – what better recommendation could an artist have than to be bought up by über-capitalists Charles and Maurice Saatchi? But he is of course aware of the irony in this. Charles Saatchi's remark on spotting his photos in a show, he says, was: "That Tom Hunter, he really needs to realise that politics and art never mix." Which is of course nonsense (and he bought the photos anyway). Nevertheless, on the whole, we are made aware of the social commentary in much art, and especially in photography, through the public exposure made possible by the patronage of the wealthy.

It was ever thus, from Caravaggio's desperate journeys in search of rich patrons to Jackson Pollock's reliance on Peggy Guggenheim and, in between, yes, the struggling Vermeer, innkeeper and father of eleven, whose paintings were bought by a family that were minor members of the Dutch nobility. Not that Hunter compares himself to great painters – he is endearingly self-deprecating and he doesn't have eleven children – but his position is perhaps similar, and this could be an added ingredient to his success, though he does say that after ten years of working in jobs that he didn't like, he was always the first into his college. "Before the tutors arrived, I was camped on the doorstep, and as soon as the dark rooms opened, I was there until they literally threw me out and turned off the electricity." Like many more mature students (though still only in his 20s) he valued the opportunity to realise his passion.

It's clearly worked wonders, and he lives in his own house now.

Tom Hunter was in conversation with Alexander Brattell as part of the PhotoHastings exhibition, at Electro Studios on 24 October.

The Flesh, The Earth, The Devil

A musician, a filmmaker and a painter; these three artists, collaborators and close friends, having exhibited at Electro Studios for several years now, return once more with new works.

Oli Spleen, Wolfgang Dubieniec and Mark Walter first bonded as friends in Brighton in 2019 when Oli was working on his album *Night Sweats & Fever Dreams*. Later, Mark relocated to the Hastings area, where Oli was born and grew up, and which Wolfgang called home. In 2023 the trio reunited and planned their first ever collaborative exhibition. That show, titled *In Harm's Way,* ran for a weekend in the upstairs space at Electro Studios, in late September. November 2024 saw a follow-up exhibition in the larger downstairs studio space. Two years on, they return to the same rooms with new art and a show that runs for nine days called *The Flesh, The Earth, The Devil*.

Here is what they say about their work and their creative approach:

OLI SPLEEN:

"In 1999 I was diagnosed HIV-positive. Facing my mortality at the end of a second year's BA in Fine Art and not wanting to live my last days within the education system, I dropped out of university and rejected visual art entirely in favour of writing and poetry. By the summer of 2000 I was hospitalised with AIDS-defining complications at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London.

"There, a doctor told me that I was within my rights to turn down the medication I was being offered and effectively end my life. At that moment I realised for the first time that I wanted to live. When my health slowly started to improve, I began work on a semi-autobiographical novel that was to be called *Depravikazi*.

"At the book launch in 2003, my first band, *The Flesh Happening,* was formed, and soon I was channelling all of my energy into songwriting. It wasn't until 2005 when I first took steps to reconnect with visual art. The first painting, *Prenez mon cœur, qu'il soit lavé!* was an anatomical self portrait with the skin removed, reflecting my feelings of vulnerability and exposure.



COURTESY OF OLI SPLEEN

Oli Spleen, Anatomical Self-Portrait. Acrylic on Canvas

"The majority of work in this exhibition was made this year, during which I've created more works than I have since the nineties."



COURTESY OF WOLFGANG DUBIENIEC

Wolfgang Dubieniec, image from film Moth Wood

WOLFGANG DUBIENIEC:

"The work of mine that you see in this show largely revolves around the process of making *Moth Wood*, a short film produced entirely by hand over the past year.

"This film became tied to its form and process during the making; it became eco-somatic. I found a way to hand-develop the celluloid that was original, meaningful to the materiality and the concept of my film, and also to me personally. Environmentally I produced a plant-based developer with nettles from Cornish woodlands near my home. Authorship is my own, but also that of the landscape and the living environment in which the work was made.

"Alongside this film, I present a second short film work in progress titled *The Corselet*, as well as sketches, paintings and prints which I produced and enlarged in the darkroom, and costumes by Ruby Small."

MARK WALTER:

"Born in Purley, my life in Surrey, London and now Sussex has provided a varied backdrop to my practice, giving a broad variety of inputs to my observation of the landscapes, textures, and diversity around me. My art practice has many strands, but the main one is the application and removal of many layers of paint, working with the surface and the subsurface until the work reaches closure.

"The process is inherently tactile and time-consuming. I build up dense layers of paint only to erode them away using sandpaper and wire wool. This cyclical pattern of creation, erasure and peeling paint continues until the surface finally reveals its conclusion.

"Returning to showcase this work at The Electro feels entirely natural. The raw textures of this industrial space perfectly mirror the grit, history, and exposed layers of my own process, allowing the artwork to feel at home within its walls."

November 13-22: Opening show 13 November, 5:30pm. Live music, including Oli Spleen's Fad Maggots on Saturday 21 November, 6pm. Electro Studios, Seaside Road, St Leonards. Open: 11am – 4pm

BFI Film Training Goes Live

CHRIS CONNELLEY

Last week, most school and college students were on a well-earned halfterm break, but for a group of young people with an interest in a creative career, all thoughts of some blissfully chilled time out were cast aside to take part in a flagship film course running in St Leonards.

The six-day programme, part of a national push to attract fresh talent to the industry, offers 18 young people under 19 years old the chance to gain practical experience as part of a team making an original short film from scratch.

The BFI Film Academy South East Introductory Course is delivered on our doorstep by The Bright Foundation – a local arts education charity set up by Academy Award-winning costume designer, John Bright. The practical programme is delivered by industry professionals, a number of whom, including writing mentor Trix Worrall, creator of cult Channel 4 show Desmond's, live here in Hastings.

The broad-based course covers all the major elements of film making, taking in scriptwriting, direction, acting, production, post-production, costume and prop design – it even includes a session on choreographing combat scenes – and is structured around the making of an original short film, which will be premiered at a special screening at Hastings Odeon cinema in early December.



THE BRIGHT FOUNDATION

Student Arthur Jenkinson (left) with Trix Worrall, film tutor

The course was open to young people from 16 to 19, and the successful students were selected having submitted applications describing why they would like to be part of the programme.

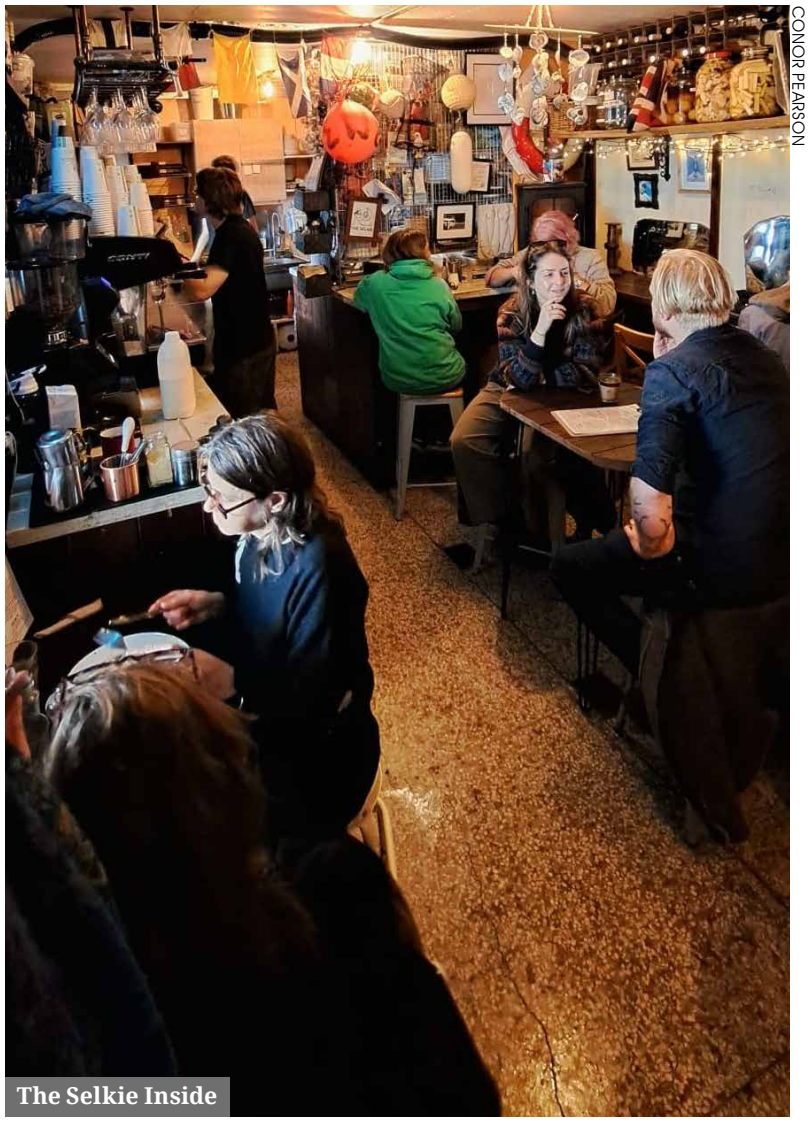
There was no requirement for people to have worked with film previously or to come with specific experience, which manifests itself in the diversity of programme attendees. The majority live in Hastings, with just a few, like Hayley (one of the programme's acting team and a student at BHASVIC in Brighton), commuting in from Eastbourne.

Brody, a uniformed services student at East Sussex College (Hastings campus) is working as an assistant director. He is most excited by the realism of the programme and getting "to feel what it's like to be on a film set" whilst Paige, a learner at Bexhill College, talks about *Going Out West*, the film they are making as a dystopian future thriller where AI has taken over the world with few survivors and a final twist. The script was mainly written by Arthur, a GCSE student at Rye College now thinking of a career as a director, who formed part of the camera team and describes the experience of working with the Bright Foundation as "pretty much changing my life".

That view is echoed by Bright Foundation CEO Polly Risbridger, who commented, "What's amazing about the introductory course is that we hand over creative control to the young people, and they literally take on every role, learning all the skills along the way. It's all their work on the screen."

By the time you read this, their film will be in post-production before its local showing and a major London premiere. Proving that giving up a half-term-lie-in can really pay dividends.





CONOR PEARSON

The Selkie Inside

Rising from the Sea and the Ashes

HIP Food talks to Conor Pearson about his journey with The Selkie Seafood Bar

As we approach winter, we set out to find how a hole-in-the-wall seafood bar that is literally on the seafront is able to remain open 365 days of the year (unless the weather makes it genuinely unsafe to be out on the seafront). But that led to us discovering the sheer guts and determination that have made this place the success it is today.

Conor, the owner of The Selkie, has worked with oysters for 15 years. He grew up working on his dad's market stall in East London and in the early 2000s, as the area began to change, he wanted to find a way to make those changes work for him.

Growing up in an Irish Catholic clan, seafood was a big part of the culture: "I always thought it was strange that such a staple food of working-class London had become something people thought of as bougie." He thought becoming an oyster barrow boy was a way he could keep hold of that culture while appealing to the area's new demographic. And Oyster Boy set up in a little corner of a stonemason's yard facing Columbia Road market. "It was the seed that eventually became The Selkie," he says.

A derelict toilet in Bottle Alley might not seem the most obvious place to set up in Hastings, but Conor could see it was something special. He describes it as "a gorgeous bit of East Sussex coast" where Sidney Little "did a stunning job with Bottle Alley and the promenade". When he looked inside and saw the original mahogany and marble fittings, he could picture the place it might become.

THE FOOD OFFER

But what about his visions for the food? Quality is the only word. Oysters from the Haward family in West Mersea, eight generations of oystermen. "I think they're the best in the UK." The rest is locally sourced: coffee from Cold Blow in Rye, meat from Beak and Tail, bread from Poppyseed in Bexhill, beer from Brewing Brothers, kombucha from Booyah and fish from Rock-a-Nore.

The kitchen itself is obviously small, but Conor knew it was possible. "We were going to spend a lot of our lives working in that kitchen, so I wanted it to be a comfortable place for the team, even if that meant sacrificing a few customer seats." This meant compromises in terms of the number The Selkie could accommodate inside. But he feels he made the right decision in creating a cosy space for sit-down customers inside and a proper working kitchen.

THE CHALLENGES

His vision for the bar itself was more of a struggle. He'd never run a bricks-and-mortar business before, and this was a heritage site. Setting up The Selkie was a "big and scary risk". Lockdown had exhausted his savings and brought his events and market business to its knees. A bounce-back loan offered an unexpected lifeline, but rather than simply use it to stay afloat, he took the risk of putting it into the site that became The Selkie.

Then, during the renovation, a fire destroyed much of the year's work – with Conor briefly stuck inside. "I'm not exaggerating to say I very nearly died in there, (huge thanks to East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service). It felt like I'd failed before I'd even begun."

LOCAL SUPPORT

He says what got him through was the friends he'd made in Hastings. "Over two days, about 20 or 30 people helped clear out the wreckage. We had a barbecue on the beach and got stuck in. At a point when I was ready to give up, that kindness put me back on track. Hastings' community, identity, art and culture was what drew me here in the first place. And suddenly, I was experiencing that community in a very tangible way."

This community stood by him again when The Selkie's outside seating was under scrutiny last summer. "We got caught between council and foreshore bureaucratic processes with confusing and contradictory rules and laws that span centuries," he says, "threatening everything we'd built."

"But the support was extraordinary," he says, with neighbouring businesses and the Coastal Users Group backing them, MP Helena Dollimore stepping in to help, and huge numbers of the community writing, calling and speaking up for them.

He also credits individual councillors, the council as a whole and the Foreshore Trust who listened, revisited decisions and helped them find a way forward that worked for everyone.

WINTER'S COMING

Resolving this issue gave the business greater certainty and goes part way to explaining what we set out to find: How does The Selkie stay open all year round? Businesses can't run on air.

Another important part of the puzzle was opening the inside of the bar to customers. It seats about 15 people, with a little faux fire in the corner "like my nan used to have", and a kitchen turning out excellent breakfasts, brunches and stews.

But Conor's not sure people noticed when it opened last year: "We've got such a reputation as an outdoor beachside spot that we're still getting the word out about our cosy little indoor space."

So there's the beach in summer and a cosy space in winter. What else is on offer? As this is Hastings there's always going to be music: "When the going is good, our little bastion makes a fantastic stage facing the beach, with the promenade behind it and the music heading out towards the sea. We've had some great events and there are plenty more to come," Conor says. "We've had beach barbecues, charity events, somewhere cosy to watch the bonfire fireworks, and music ranging from traditional Irish and folk to punk rock and DJ sets."

Of course, they're always at the mercy of the weather, and have had to cancel one local band, La Beaubô!, three times because of rain, but "when we finally get them on, it's going to be epic".

They'll still make the most of the sunnier days: "beach seating, blankets, coffee, a bowl of hot stew and watching the waves". But they'd also love to be somewhere people warm up with a mulled wine or a hot toddy after a Christmas walk or the New Year's Day swim.

"When it's less inviting outside, there's our cosy little bunker, with windows looking out over the crashing sea. Somewhere to take shelter with great food and really lovely people."

A final part of the puzzle is Conor's business ethics: "After a lifetime in hospitality, I know how tough it is to have a shift cancelled because business is quiet. As an owner, I want to give people hours they can rely on," Conor says. We've got a special team worth keeping together. So much of our feedback is about the crew: our manager, our kitchen team and the sunny, friendly people who make The Selkie feel the way it does. So, we are open, whatever the weather."

And rather than dial everything back, Conor is taking a punt in the other direction. Plans include: "Evening oyster and wine workshops, moules-frites nights, book clubs and intimate music gigs – with only being able to fit 25 people standing for the gigs it will be very intimate."

And there will be evenings offering a hearty bowl of stew and a glass of wine or beer for £15, where "the music's good and the staff are cool". Cheap, cheerful and filling. As Conor says: "Hastings can get quiet in winter, but the people who live here year-round still need somewhere to go on a dark January or February evening. If there's enough support to make it work, we'll keep those evenings going and keep our team together through the darker months."



FIONA MCGARRY

The Selkie Outside

FOOTBALL

Rough Justice as Home Run Ends

24 OCTOBER

Hastings Utd 2
Waltham Abbey 3

31 OCTOBER

Hastings Utd 0
Faversham Town 1

HUGH SULLIVAN

After nine successive home victories in league and cup games this season (including penalty shootouts in two), Hastings United's footballers have finally tasted defeat – on two successive Saturdays.

Elimination from the FA Trophy by Isthmian South team Waltham Abbey will cost them prize money, but in the greater scheme of things it's not a competition that matters overmuch. Losing in the Isthmian South East league to current promotion rivals Faversham Town will have hit deeper.

Captained by former United midfielder Tommie Fagg, Faversham presented a formidable physical challenge, which was aided by a lax performance on the part of referee Joshua Williams. To the ire of a subdued crowd at the Pilot Field, 'U's centre forward Kesna Clarke was frequently manhandled without penalty by robust defenders. More blatantly, excessive touchline yardage was stolen for a succession of long throws. From one of these, on the half hour, the ball deflected into the Hastings penalty area, and a Faversham forward was adjudged to have been tripped. Fagg scored from the resulting spot kick for what proved to be the only goal of the game.

United's defence held firm after that, despite some dangerous incursions. Goalkeeper Harry Haines made a couple of smart saves, Ollie Black and Sam Pidgeon stayed largely unruffled in the centre, and Sam King and Mitchell Chapman fetched and carried industriously in midfield. But, further forward, Kian Moynes struggled to make an impact. And while Clarke battled unprotected up front, neither Callum Erskine on the left nor Freddie Legg on the right were able to give him much support.

The substitutions of Max Walsh for Moynes and Ayo Olasimbe for Erskine midway through the second half improved the home attack, and over the last ten minutes they pressed hard – too hard, in the opinion of Mr Williams. Having failed to hand out any disciplinary cards to transgressing Faversham players, he cautioned Hastings captain Tom Chalmers for a late tackle in the 88th minute, then sent him off for a second offence in the 93rd. Manager Ronnie Dolan may feel this was somewhat rough justice in the context of the game as a whole, and will certainly rue any resulting suspension.

United could still have snatched an unlikely draw in the last minute, when all 11 Faversham players defended their own penalty area from a long throw by Black. The ball was cleared out to Haines, who had advanced out of his own half to within 30 yards of the visitors' goal. He rifled a drive that looked like it might break the net before it flew just over.

The result left Hastings equal on points at the top of the South East league with Faversham and South Park, having played one match fewer. The 'U's will have gone ahead again if they win or draw the game in hand against Deal Town on Tuesday (after this report has gone to press).

Tomorrow (Saturday) they play away at Cray Valley before two more home games, against Sevenoaks Town next Tuesday and Steyning Town the following Saturday 14 November.



JON SMALLDON

Sam Pidgeon (in claret and blue) defends against Waltham Abbey

TROPHY DEFEAT

United's run in the FA Trophy had ended on 24 October when they went down 2-3 to Waltham Abbey. On a wet and blustery day sandwiched between Storms Austen and Boelo, the 'U's went three goals down in a calamitous eight-minute spell midway through the first half.

On August Bank holiday, the 'U's had conceded a three-goal deficit to Crowborough Athletic within 13 minutes but hit back to win 4-3. On this occasion, too, they made a fight of it in the second half, with Chapman in particular putting in a sterling effort in midfield to minimise the absence of Chalmers, out with a knock to his knee. Clarke and Pidgeon scored, and Warren Hugues-Mfula had a chance to level the scores right at the end, denied by a fine save from the visiting keeper.

TENNIS/PADEL

Rackets for Bowls at White Rock Gardens

HUGH SULLIVAN

Hastings Borough Council has announced that it is in line to receive £1.3million investment funds to construct a new covered tennis and padel centre at White Rock Gardens.

A complex of three tennis courts and three padel courts would be built, at least partly on land that is currently used for bowls, at a projected overall cost of £1.8million. The deal is still being "considered" by the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) but, if approved, will consist of £1million offered by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport via Sport England, together with £300,000 from the LTA's Tennis Foundation. The council has pledged 'match funding' of the £500,000 balance required.

In former times, White Rock Gardens accommodated both grass and hard tennis courts and an array of bowling greens, all administered by the council. The tennis courts have been long neglected and vandalised, becoming unplayable as both surface and netting deteriorated. Bowls has continued to be played by three competing clubs, two of them sharing the pavilion at the western end. But the numbers of bowlers have gradually diminished, with an aging demographic, and subsidies from the council being reduced or withdrawn. The Covid pandemic in 2020-22 had a particularly damaging effect, from which the sport has not recovered.

There has also been a security problem at the Gardens with the remaining bowling greens subjected to frequent incursion by local youths playing casual football, riding bikes or otherwise abusing the vulnerable surfaces.

This summer, the council installed two temporary 'pop-up' padel courts on the former hard court tennis area, with access and payment (£20 per court per hour) administered by online coding, and rackets and balls provided from the reception area of the Falaise gym operated by Freedom & Leisure. Demand, according to the council, has been high and justifies the major initiative now proposed.

Cllr Glenn Haffenden, leader of the council and lead councillor for sport and leisure, said: "It's fantastic news that we are being considered for this funding, and I'd like to thank the LTA for their support of this project. The success of the pop-up padel courts at White Rock Gardens over the summer has shown that there is a demand for padel in Hastings, and this funding would allow us to bring covered courts that can be used all year round to help keep Hastings residents active."

Local enthusiasts for other sports, in particular football, may query the cash-strapped council's expenditure of £500,000 on tennis and padel. Tennis is already well catered for in the town, with thriving members' clubs at Amherst and The Green, and recent upgrading of the public courts at Alexandra Park. Padel clearly has some modish commercial backers, but whether this prospective advance merits Cllr Haffenden's confidence remains to be seen.

OFF-GRID SOLAR WORKSHOPS



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Sizing your off-grid solar system
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