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September 2019 Newsletter

Special Meeting Thursday 12th September 6.30 for 7.00

This meeting is open to all local residents

A G E N D A

- 1] Dr Craig Namvar will give an update on the new surgery in Rock a Nore Road and the services available. Questions.
- 2] East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service will set out their latest proposals for Smaller size fire appliances. Questions.

Inside this newsletter

The future of the Isabel Blackman Centre, Winding St.

The launch of the appeal for help to buy the building

- how you can help; Getting involved

The Isabel Blackman Centre

The picture at 1st September

Working Consortium

This group have been meeting since January to resolve the issues that will allow this precious building to continue to serve Hastings and its people.

Hastings Voluntary Action led by Steve Manwaring. HVA have taken on lead responsibility for negotiations to buy the building. HVA have an outstanding record in leading and supporting the Voluntary and Community sector.

Age UK East Sussex led by Steve Hare who is the local contact with this leading national charity. Age UK have strength and depth on all aspects of public funding and support for local resources that help work to deliver a range of reliable services to older people.

Sussex Community Development Association led by Penny Shimmin, were the contractor delivering the service at the Isabel Blackman Centre. [The centre has now been closed for 20 weeks]. SCDA have tried repeatedly to open a 2 day week Friendship club since April designed to offer support for past users. The key intention was to reduce isolation and the pressure on families. And help reduce the impact of Pensioner Poverty. After repeated requests ESCC thought they might want to use the building but nothing has happened !

Hastings Seniors Forum led by Pam Brown giving clear voice to local seniors and representing them at County level.

Hastings Old Town Residents Association have supported the work at the Isabel Blackman Centre. We have been part of various reviews over the last 20 years. A way must be found to keep this precious building serving the people of Hastings.

ALSO behind this picture is the Isabel Blackman Foundation. In 1976 they gave 1/3 of the cost of constructing the existing building. Since then they have provided significant grants to help maintain and develop the building. Most recently they funded the installation cost of a lift for £50,000.

BUT when HOTRA asked a Freedom of Information question about how much money ESCC had spent on capital works they have no traceable record. This in itself speaks volumes about the attitude to Hastings' needs at County Hall.

Remember ESCC never paid a penny for this site when it was transferred from HASTINGS Borough Council following local government reforms. Will ESCC have the audacity to take the sale proceeds and not give back to the town the money donated locally ?

Fundraising

From day 1 it was obvious there would need to be a major appeal. Initially the Working Consortium thought it might be possible to arrange some kind of rent or rent to buy scheme with ESCC. We learnt that in the spring they had asked local commercial estate agent agent Dyer Hobbs to produce a valuation for the sale of the building. ESCC have been asked repeatedly to share that information but have ignored these requests. At the moment all ESCC will say is that the sale will be launched in October. It is feared that ESCC may run a 'blind auction' in order to achieve the highest price.

The impact of this delay is that it makes it difficult for us to raise the amount needed. We know that the Roebuck surgery together with the adjacent pharmacy sold for £700,000 about 18 months ago. This is a larger building than the IBC. The new owners have plans to convert it to 9 flats. It is unwise to launch an appeal without a solid target figure but the clock is ticking.

HOTRA managed to secure the registration of the IBC in June as a Community Asset. That step triggered a 6 month moratorium preventing ESCC from disposing of the building without allowing a chance to buy. Ironically the last day of the moratorium is 25th December.

We are therefore launching an appeal for PROMISES.

There will be 2 main strands to the appeal.

- An appeal letter will be sent to all significant households seeking their donations;

- a Crowdfunding site will also be setup seeking promises from people.

All promises will be recorded and people asked to consider agreeing to their money being Gift Aided so the tax can be reclaimed. {This brings an extra 20%}

- a website will be launched by HVA telling people about 'Getting involved'. Suggestions and offers of help will be welcome.

Already 2 early supporters have promised £5,500 between them

Holding the Promises

HVA have held funds for past appeals. They have established mechanisms and safeguards in place. Once the picture is clear payments will be requested.

This strong desire to create a space which can be used by the whole of Hastings for voluntary activities is fully supported by HOTRA's Management Committee.

If you have any ideas please email me dick@hotra.org.uk

Sea Water quality and Southern Water

Earlier this year Southern Water were revealed for under reporting the quality of water in tests of river and sea water over many years. In Hastings there remains a large number of miss connections especially in the eastern part of town. Whenever there is heavy rain the quality of sea water is affected. Southern Water's profits average £4 - £5m each week. They have persisted in refusing to resolve this problem. Surely it is time for the Environment Agency + Hastings Council + the Foreshore Trust to apply more pressure and resolve this problem ? It is time that Pelham beach swimmers enjoyed the same clean water as those using the beaches further west.

Summer Storytelling Sessions at Hastings Contemporary

During Old Town Week the first ever children's summer scheme took place at the gallery. 10 sessions took place - all were free. Each session started with Jamie Crawford telling some stories. This was followed by a practical session. The children used withies and special tissue paper to make banners. These were then decorated. Sarah Evans and Emma Hughes encouraged the children to produce work of a high standard. On the last session the children were joined by Cllr Nigel Sinden and Cllr James Bacon - the Mayor and mini Mayor. Nigel sat on the floor to tell a story of his own and show how in tune he is with the spirit of storytelling.

The banners will be carried as part of the Children's Day on Sunday 6th October. This forms part of the annual Hastings Storytelling Festival. Last year nearly 1,000 people took part in the parade with the Mayor of Hastings in the lead. We are grateful to Hastings Opportunity Area, Hastings Contemporary and Trade Paints for all of their support.

Pavements and kerbs

Neglect of our highways is well documented with continuing reporting about potholes. Here in the Old Town the failure to deal with displaced kerb stones, which are often heavy granite, and weeds growing between pavement slabs providing a new trip hazard, especially for the visually impaired is obvious. This is further evidence of the increasing incompetence of East Sussex County Council. In some places like All Saints Street the impression of being in a forgotten jungle is a new feature for visitors !

New Refuse contract

The collection of household rubbish in the Old Town is very challenging as there are so few properties with space for a wheelie bin. The lkast contractor Kier were unable to provide a satisfactory service. The bold decision to change to Biffa is now being seen as the right thing to do. Whilst some questions remain it is right to thank Hastings Council for this return to more acceptable practices.