

Isabel Blackman Centre Outline Position Paper August 2019

Introduction

The closure of Isabel Blackman Centre was a significant blow to older people and the loss of a community facility in the Old Town has been the subject of much discussion. This briefing paper and statement sets out some of the background and describes the efforts being made by a group of local not-for-profit organisations to find a future for the building and offer services to older people.

About the Building

Isabel Blackman Centre, in Winding Street, Old Town Hastings has been a community facility in some form since the 1930s. In 1966, a donation of £120,000 from the Isabel Blackman Trust enabled the current building to be converted from washhouses into a community facility dedicated to the welfare of older people in the Hastings Old Town area. With the local government reforms of 1974, social services came under the responsibility of East Sussex County Council and the building passed out of Hastings Borough Council control into the control of East Sussex County Council Social Services Department. The Centre continued to play a large part in the lives of local older people as it developed into a much-needed Day Care service 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

From 2010 a number of community organisations such as Age UK East Sussex and SCDA delivered community services such as podiatry and Footcare and a community café and day services from the building. In 2015 SCDA was successful in winning a tender to provide day care at IBC and did so until a review of Day Services by ESCC forced the closure of the Centre in March 2019.

The Current Position

The Centre has remained empty since March 2019 and recently (July) ESCC Estates stated their intent to invite proposals to rent the building or failing an acceptable proposal, to sell it on the open market. It is our view that there are 2 key principles at stake here:-

1. The pressing need to find a future for a building which has been part of the local landscape for many years offering services and support to older people.
2. If this is not possible and the building was disposed of by East Sussex that the capital receipt generated by any sale should, given the charitable donation which led to its purchase be “ring-fenced” to Hastings so that this keeps faith with the buildings unique history.

Isabel Blackman Project Group

In response to the proposed closure Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) were asked to convene a meeting of stakeholders including the Magdalen and Lasher Charity, Isabel Blackman Foundation, Hastings and St Leonards Seniors Forum, Hastings Old Town Residents Association (HOTRA), Age UK East Sussex, and Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA). From these meetings a formal partnership has been formed consisting of:-

- Age Uk East Sussex
- Hastings Voluntary Action
- Hastings and St Leonards Seniors Forum
- Hastings Old Town Residents Association (HOTRA)
- Sussex Community Development Association

Our initial work has been configured on some short, medium and long term objectives

Short Term	To protect IBC as an asset by registering it with the local authority as an Asset of Community Value, embark on discussions with ESCC about the short term use of the building and to raise funding to deliver weekly opportunities for older people to continue to meet as a "Friendship Group to reduce social isolation.
Medium Term	Engage with stakeholders and produce a business plan examining how a range of services and uses of the centre could result in a sustainable model to allow the asset to continue to play a role in service delivery.
Long Term	To secure the transfer of the building as a community asset and to launch the project to enable older people and the wider community to achieve long lasting benefit.

At the time of writing an application led by HOTRA and HVA has been successful resulting in the building being listed by Hastings Borough Council. A full moratorium period of 6 months has been declared which will prevent the sale of the building by East Sussex County Council. A fundraising campaign has been launched to resource a weekly friendship club so that Older People have something to go to in the Old Town. The project group are meeting regularly to engage with the County Council, undertake a business planning process, and identify relevant funding streams. It is the start of a process by the organisations have committed time resources and capacity to work together on this proposal.

Our Vision for the Isabel Blackman Centre

It is our vision that the Isabel Blackman Centre becomes a vibrant community space, delivering a range of services to those in need, and used by older people and the broader community in the Old Town and Hastings, in perpetuity.

The offer that will be developed will be a strongly rooted, placed-based approach to the collective vision to improve the health and wellbeing, capacity and resilience of the local community.

The vision will be developed and shaped by the communities that we serve- their energy, resourcefulness and imagination will strongly influence plans to revamp and relaunch the Centre.

Principles underpinning our approach

A whole community, integrative approach: We will further an asset-based approach that identifies and nurtures community assets and capabilities centred on the Isabel Blackman Centre.

Connectedness and collaboration: We have already founded an active alliance of community organisations – HOTRA, HVA, SCDA and AUKES - between us we will encourage the delivery of a range of activities associated with the wider determinants of health.

Resilience: We aim to strengthen IBC as a community asset- in the community and for the community, in perpetuity.

Isabel Blackman Centre – a health and wellbeing community asset

For most of its recent history the Isabel Blackman Centre has been a centre for the delivery of services intending to improve the health and wellbeing of older people. Given the continuing needs of the local community it is highly likely that any new entity of the centre will again embrace the ethos where the centre is renowned as a vehicle for the delivery of excellent health and wellbeing initiatives.

We will echo in our plans the contention of the Marmot Report finding that 30% of health outcomes are based on clinical interventions whilst 70% are based on the wider social determinants of health.

The local context

Hastings, a coastal town traditionally reliant on tourism and public sector employment has within its boundaries some of the most deprived wards in the country. In 2015 Hastings was ranked 13th most deprived town in England. Whilst Hastings has benefitted from inward investment and social programmes helping to lay the foundations of business, public and voluntary sector partnerships, there is evidence of deep-rooted and persistent disadvantage and poverty that requires more hard work and initiatives to tackle such problems.

Seven Super Output Areas (SOAs) in Hastings are ranked 10th most deprived nationally for poverty amongst older people. In Hastings and Rother CCG 18% of older people are affected by income deprivation. This is significantly higher than the East Sussex average of 15%. Hastings and St Leonards has the greatest proportion of older people affected by income deprivation, with over one in five of the population (23%) affected. This compares to 12% in Rural Rother.

These SOA areas surround the Old Town where IBC is situated and indeed the majority of the users of the day services in 2014-2019 came from these areas which included:

The area broadly known as Hollington in North West St Leonards, at the opposite end of the Link Road from Sidley and with a large concentration of social housing and negative deprivation indicators.

Central St Leonards and Hastings Town Centre, an area along the seafront and stretching inland largely characterised by large older housing stock in multiple occupation with a highly transient population, many with BME or asylum seeking origins, and high incidence of homelessness.

North East Hastings, made up a several large social housing clusters some characterised by particularly poor outward connectivity and a history of environmental challenges

	Hastings	East Sussex
Life expectancy at birth	79.3	82.2
Households in fuel poverty	5,135	23,411
Recorded crimes per 1,000 people	86.5	51.1
Homeless households accepted in priority need	260	685
Gross weekly earnings in £	364	391
Unemployment rate	6	3.1

It is our contention that the prevalence of such relative disadvantage and poverty makes it all the more imperative that the Isabel Blackman Centre is reopened for the benefit of the community and that we are able to harness the creativity in an asset-based approach to the provision of community services locally.

Our alliance and the local community

Our alliance will in partnership embrace the values and principles of asset based approaches for building stronger and healthier communities and will help sustain activities in our community.

We will work closely with all key stakeholders who will participate in co-production processes around the future of IBC. These stakeholders will include Hastings and St Leonards Seniors Forum and Hastings Borough Council. We'll take a flexible approach to communication and facilitation methods in order to meet the needs of and engage with different key stakeholders.

Our project alliance partners have experienced and modelled effective methods of engaging people from the local community through fundraising and community asset transfer, developing volunteering, community and stakeholder engagement, planning and implementing initiatives based on engagement results, and supporting local people to co-produce activities.

We will build on our alliance's experience, knowledge and skills to involve local people with this IBC project including:

- Co-facilitating community forum meetings, acting as a catalyst for developing new ideas
- Training local people as volunteer community messengers i.e. local people with 'know how' who can support their friends, neighbours, colleagues and family members to find out about and engage with project activities
- Using a range of communication and facilitation methods to engage and involve local people
- Using existing networks built up over many years by HVA and HOTRA
- Co-delivering community surveys and events to reach far across the community
- Co-producing activities to meet local need

- Outreach activities in places where local people congregate in the broader community in Hastings e.g. GP surgeries, local parks
- Using IT based solutions to facilitate engagement (e.g. Facebook)

Potential future service delivery from Isabel Blackman Centre

Whilst the IBC Project Group Alliance will be guided and strongly influenced by what the local community sees as a priority for the IBC, it is likely that there will be a strong health emphasis on activities that take shape there. This is recognition that health and wellbeing is driven by social factors and not necessarily medical interventions. It is an aim therefore that any services that are delivered will have a transformative effect on peoples' lives.

There is the potential for some or all of the following services/activities to be delivered from IBC:

Connections- Making new friends: Day Club for the over 50s-

This will be a friendship club based on the model developed by AUKES and also to an extent delivered by SCDA in the past. Initially it will cater for 20-30 members who will pay a modest membership fee to join the clubs on two days a week at the Centre. Transport may be provided and the aim of the club will be to enable new friendships to take place and overcome social isolation. The club will seek to improve physical health, promote psychological wellbeing and confidence and support people to remain independent in their own homes as long as possible.

Community Café as a social enterprise

A Community Café operated for nearly 10 years prior to the closure of the Centre and during SCDA's tenure; it broadened its menu to include many healthy options. The café could be open on the days that the Day Club operates from 11 – 3PM and provide tasty, nutritious and affordable meals for the club members. Eventually the café could expand its service to the local community at commercial cost thereby ensuring its commercial sustainability.

Art & Music Therapy Group

On one or more days a month an art & music therapy group could be delivered at IBC. This would be based on work piloted at the Warrior Square GP surgery by partner organisation Art on Prescription. The project will enhance the wellbeing of participant's lives and create an enjoyable, life-affirming experience for them.

There have been a number of studies that have highlighted the positive effects on music in helping people with dementia cope with their condition. The project could involve a facilitator/tutor delivering a music therapy course to up to 20 older people in IBC on a twice- monthly basis for up to six months. AUKES has links with facilitators who provide a range of excellent creative classes across East Sussex. The sessions would be funded via fundraising – some success in this has in the past been achieved via the Foreshore Trust and a small subscription fee by participants.

Foot care & podiatry

Age UK East Sussex could run a clinic at IBC – there is an ongoing need for venues to deliver foot care in Hastings and this 'paid for' service could in a short space of time establish a vibrant and growing service to meet local and future need.

Healthy Living Clubs

There is a regular need for venues to expand Age UK East Sussex's Healthy Living clubs for the over 50s- AUKES already has busy and well-attended clubs in Hastings and St Leonards, Rye, Bexhill Polegate and elsewhere in East Sussex. With a small start-up fund the clubs then become self-sustaining.

Social prescribing

Age UK East Sussex and SCDA deliver 'social prescribing' services elsewhere in East Sussex. The aim of the services is to support the delivery of non-medical interventions for individuals and enhance wellbeing in GP practices/the community. The services-

- Provide care navigation for patients with long term health conditions and/or frailty when identified by primary care staff.
- Reduce social isolation in vulnerable patients.
- Improve inclusion and take up of community health, social services and community social groups.

Both SCDA and AUKES are in a Social prescribing Pathway Project with Southdown and Care for the Carers, the aim of which is to influence and shape the developing agenda that will see the spread of Link Workers delivering social prescription in the new PCNs across East Sussex.

IBC could well be an ideal venue for a drop-in model of social prescription link work- whereby after a GP referring a patient to the Centre, a Link worker could work with the patient to deal with the issues facing them and improve health and well-being by making positive life changes.

What needs to happen next

The project group are keen to work together but the terms on which the building is made available by East Sussex County Council will be crucial. We are seeking the support of local stakeholders, Hastings Borough Council, the Seniors Forum, Hastings Community Network to ensure that ESCC think creatively about the future, transfer the building on terms most favourable to making these proposals happen and, by doing, so keep faith with the history and purpose of this unique building.

Making your views known

Together we have launched a petition asking East Sussex County Council to engage with the voluntary sector about the buildings future or, if the building is sold, "ring-fence" the capital receipt to benefit older people in Hastings. You can view and sign the petition here:-

[https://democracy.eastsussex.gov.uk/mgEPetitionDisplay.aspx?id=500000027&TPID=503118186&\\$LO\\$=1](https://democracy.eastsussex.gov.uk/mgEPetitionDisplay.aspx?id=500000027&TPID=503118186&LO=1)

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