

Special Members Newsletter – Autumn 2009

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Isabel Blackman Centre – review of Services for Older People by ESCC

For nearly 2 years ESCC have been talking to the users, the staff and the Voluntary and Community sector. From the outset clear promises were given that the IBC would not close [as happened in Rye after the last review]. At Easter consultants were appointed to look at the issues. Then again in May the wider community were told that the centre would not close. On 7th July, just a few days after the County Council elections the ESCC Cabinet agree to close the IBC for a year for 'refurbishment'. The same meeting agreed a staff redundancy budget of over £330,000 – a huge sum and a lot of lost jobs.

The need for Day Care provision is growing as people live longer. In Hastings alone there are over 4,400 people who are both old and living in poverty, yet only about 40 places are available. More need to be provided in the near future. HOTRA have raised the matter with Hastings Voluntary Action, Hastings and Rother Health & Social Care Forum and all 3 political parties. We are seeking their support in making sure ESCC continue to be the direct providers unless they can find a voluntary group or charity that can match the quality of IBC. Both the Isabel Blackman and the Moreton Centre in St Leonards need to stay. All of this has been unsettling and unfair to the vulnerable users and to a first class staff group. This is not the way to save money.

MEETINGS

Wednesday 30th September at 6.30 in the History House, jointly with OHPS –
To consider plans to provide a new 15 bed safe unit at Old Hastings House.

Tuesday 20th October at 7.00 in All Saints hall
The Hastings academies debate with a panel of key people.

WEBSITE HAVE YOU LOOKED AT OUR WEBSITE ? www.hotra.org.uk

Secondary Schools in Hastings and St Leonards

For over 10 years local schools have been performing below the National average in GCSE exams. HOTRA has been raising the concerns of local families for several years. ESCC decided to set up a federation of Filsham Valley, The Grove and Hillcrest Schools managed by Sir Dexter Hutt and his Ninestiles team. From September 2008 a huge effort has been made by the pupils and staff. The GCSE results in August showed tremendous improvement. Well done everyone. If similar gains are made in the 2 remaining years of the Ninestiles contract then the schools will be performing well above the national average. Clear evidence that Hastings young people can do as well as any when given the right chances.

Separately a small group have been working with some professors from Brighton University to try to find the underlying reason for the past poor performance. Only when there is a full diagnosis can the problem be effectively dealt with. The work is continuing. Members will be kept up to date as the story unfolds.

And now we start the debate about the academies

Over the next 6 weeks there will be a series of meetings at the 3 schools and around the town to explain the academies proposal. Currently the 3 schools have many spare spaces that cost a lot of money and could result in a school closing. One alternative is to consider opening 2 academies – one in the east and another in the west. These would have new buildings that would open in 2012 / 3 Pupils of the existing schools would be guaranteed a place. Staff would also transfer. The picture looks good but not all academies are successful.

On **Tuesday 20th October at 7.00 in All Saints hall** we are organising the only debate that will look at both sides of the case. A speaker from the Anti Academies Alliance will join Julian Crampton, Vice Chancellor of Brighton University and Bill Goodwin ESCC Academies Project Manager and Sir Dexter Hutt, leader of Ninestiles. Please come along and hear about the issues and concerns. This is an Open meeting considering the future of our childrens education. The future economic and social well being of Hastings will be significantly affected by the final decision.

Old Hastings House – run by the Magdalen and Lasher charity

This highly regarded residential home for Older people is a key part of the Old Town. It currently looks after 45 people. As people are living longer there is an increased need for safe provision for up to 15 people with mental health needs. To meet this challenge the charity would like to explain why they would like to build a new hostel towards the rear of their site. Local people will have a chance to hear the details and look at draft plans at a meeting held jointly with OHPS on **Wednesday 30th September at 6.30 at the History House.**

If it goes ahead not only will it meet the needs of a very vulnerable group it will also provide more jobs in the Old Town.

The Chess Square in George Street

Hastings Council have been pressing ahead with repairs to the seats and paving. The new chess piece store has been built. HBC have also commissioned new fencing at the rear of the site and will refurbish the waste bins.

Our Awards for All grant has already paid for Sarah Evans to work with some pupils from Torfield School. Their picture linking sea creatures to chess pieces will be featured on the sculptures. Thanks to Blue Reef Aquarium for making these children so welcome on their visit.

Leigh Dyer, our local metalsmith / artist is busy turning the designs into large sculptures in stainless steel. The King piece – with a conger eel entwined – stands over 1 metre high. There will also be an octopus some sea horses / knights and a spinning moon. This work which is very labour intensive will take Leigh through to November to produce. The wait will be truly worthwhile. The space created should be especially welcoming to younger children. It should help to attract families to the Old Town and to the lovely childrens bookshop opposite Butlers – and to the new toy shop further up the High Street.

Courthouse Street

For a few hours in August ESCC Highways closed the street and created a smooth flat surface – with no trip hazards. In October they will be back to apply a new colour coat top surface. Traders have already noticed the increased footfall of customers. As in George Street pedestrianisation sustains and builds retail activity – and keeps jobs.

Rock A Nore Road. The Stade Open Space and a new Community building

Very frustratingly all of the plans have to be re-submitted to Hastings Planning Committee, hopefully by November. For residents living in Rock A Nore Road this has been a great disappointment.

At a July meeting involving ESCC Highways, the Police and residents new plans were looked at. Traffic calming would start with the new set of traffic lights by the Royal Standard. Next a raised platform would be built at the junction with All Saints Street. This would reduce speed and assist with wheelchair access to Winkle Island. Then Rock a Nore Road itself would be narrowed. Further along there would be more humps. Access to the fish market by large lorries collecting the catch would be improved.

Everyone at the meeting felt there would be as much improvement as could be achieved. Possibly the best news for residents was that the work could start in January 2010. Sadly the delay means that those most affected in the middle of the night by the job racers will continue to have their sleep disturbed for many more months.

Licensing Review for 6 premises in George Street

Many thanks are due to both the Police and Hastings Council for all their efforts to bring this situation back under control. The noise and behaviour especially at weekends had become unacceptable to those who live there. Noise levels on some occasions exceeded European Safety standards. Repeated warnings had been given to the licensees. The Police log of incidents is awful. Sometimes the Police were the target for flying bottles. The impact on the residents who live there started to worsen over the winter. Some premises had inadequately trained staff in charge.

On 2 separate days in July and August over 40 people attended the hearings of the HBC Licensing Sub Committee. The Committee placed what can only be described as modest conditions consistently. Basically the designated Premises Supervisor must exercise control over those customers outside their premises, who must remain drinking in the fenced off areas. Drinking outside those areas will be regarded as a breach of the Bye Laws. It should make it easier to Police and the current very high levels of officers may not be needed in the future.

Membership

Reminders are being distributed if you have forgotten to pay your 2009 subs. If you want to join please put your name and address together with a £5 payment inside an envelope marked HOTRA. This can be either dropped through the Treasurer's letterbox – Nikki Port 17 High Street - or left at Butlers who kindly pass it on. You will receive a receipt.

Website

Kim Stallwood has been coopted on to the Management Committee. He has offered to build up our website so that members are better informed. If you want to be contacted by email please include your email address with your subs. Why not look up the HOTRA website ? Go to www.hotra.org.uk if you want to know more.

You can also contact your Chairman by email – dick@hotra.org.uk

Lloyds Pharmacy – new extension to the High Street shop

Work on site will start in the next few weeks. Good news at last.