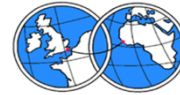




Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link

bringing two communities together



Registered charity no. 1127137

www.hastingshastings.org.uk

Chairperson's Annual Report 2016/17

Introduction

Another challenging year for the Link which seems to have flown by. A year of optimism with the build up to the tenth anniversary of the twinning link and the news that the teachers exchanges could resume in 2017 and welcoming Isobel on board to help Roger but then hopes dashed by the news that the Sierra Leone teachers had been refused their visas for the return visit.

The year began with the small group visiting Sierra Leone to assess the impact of Ebola on education and health services and what the priorities were for us to support. My thanks go to those who made the journey, Roger, Christine and Richard and to Yvonne, without whose support and guidance, the visit would not have happened.

The visit enabled Roger to assess the impact Ebola had had on the schools and education and Christine was able to establish how the supplies we had sent during the outbreak had been used to support the Health Centre and assess what else we could do to help it continue to provide health care and develop. With Yvonne's support, the team were also able to start rebuilding relationships with the Head Man and the local Association and to begin to identify future priorities for the community. We will hear from Roger later about his work with Isobel and the schools and from Christine about the progress with the Health Centre.

That dialogue with the Hastings Development Committee and the Hastings Association has led to some interesting discussions on future projects and funding. These discussions will need to continue so that we can finalise and agree the Link Strategy 2017 - 2022 and develop the Action Plan to prioritise projects for funding.

Management of the Link

Moving on to the events of 2016;

Committee Meetings

Our General Committee met on five occasions during the year to hear reports from the Treasurer and the conveners of sub-committees and to discuss all issues affecting the work of the Link.

Sub-Committee Meetings

Regular meetings of the sub-committees for Health and for Education took place throughout the year, ably chaired by Christine and Roger respectively.

Trustees Meetings

The Trustees also met on four occasions to discuss and respond to correspondence from the Development Committee in Sierra Leone, work through the detail of and refine the draft strategy, review budget commitments and discuss further ideas for fundraising activities.

Partnership Activities with the Community of Hastings Sierra Leone

Exchange Visits:

The small team was able to visit Hastings SL in February 2016 to review the situation and identify priorities for future work. Neither the British Council nor the local education authorities here in the UK would support teacher exchange visits so close to the end of the Ebola outbreak.

The exchange visit in February this year was possible however and coincided with the 10th Anniversary of the Twinning of the two towns. Hastings Borough Council's Deputy Mayor, Nigel was able to join the group of teachers, health sub-committee members and Yvonne and Yvette to support the formal celebrations organized by the Sierra Leone Hastings Association and meetings with fellow dignitaries in Hastings and Freetown.

On their return our Patron, Michael Foster, then High Sherriff of East Sussex, hosted a champagne reception to celebrate the 10th anniversary at the Town Hall accompanied by the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Leader of the Council.

As Roger will explain later, optimism for the future was unfortunately subsequently dashed when the Sierra Leone teachers were refused their visas for the return visit which somewhat diluted the anniversary celebrations in the UK. We do still however await the unveiling of the new twinning sign on the Borough Boundary!

Twin Town Centre:

We have been in extensive dialogue with the Hastings Development Committee in Sierra Leone over the needs of the Twin Town Centre. Minor repairs were agreed and funded but there was real concern over the long term sustainability of the building. Efforts were made during the February 2016 and 2017 visits to establish a clear understanding of the need to operate it on a more 'commercial' basis and generate income from letting out the residential accommodation and the function rooms to pay for ongoing maintenance and staffing.

What became clear was that the TTC needs a major injection of funds to redecorate it, carry out repairs to the residential accommodation and plumbing, replace the generators and generally upgrade the facilities so that they are attractive to rent. Numerous ideas have been submitted by the Hastings Development Committee and have been discussed with the Hastings Association UK but there is a nervousness of funding this work without the assurance that it can be operated on a business like basis to generate income to sustain its future. The discussions will continue.

Health Centre:

Christine will report in detail on the work with the Health Centre and the local Health Authorities. The two key successes during the year were the drilling of a new borehole and the refurbishment of the laboratory in the Health Centre, both funded by the Link.

Our thanks must also go to Christine and the rest of the Health Sub-Committee for their determined efforts.

Waste and Recycling

I was unable to accompany the team in February 2016 and no progress has been therefore been made with the waste and recycling projects. There is however still support for the Biogas project from the local community but it would need constant supervision.

Schools

Aby assisted by Isabel Roger has made significant progress with the schools twinning but with every new school twinning they seem to suffer a set back with another withdrawing from the scheme.

In addition to the work on sharing good teaching practice investigations are underway to develop proposals for improving basic sanitation and water supplies in schools as the lack of these is often the reason children, especially girls do not regularly attend school.

Our thanks must go to Roger, Isabel and all of the teacher team for their continued efforts to maintain the links between the schools and to rebuild them now visits are possible once again.

Fund Raising

Fundraising efforts continued at a pace during 2016. Work to raise the profile of the Link through increased press coverage and the Facebook site continued alongside the continued development and updating of the website. Our thanks must go to Steph for his time and efforts on the web site.

There remains however a concern that we have not gained greatly in committed membership as a consequence and we need to continue to develop ways of marketing the Link, presenting it in a professional manner and attracting new members.

We must offer our special thanks all of our members and our friends and colleagues in the community for the tremendous efforts they have made during the year. We must also thank Hastings Borough Council for its continued support even in the face of severe financial constraints it faces and we hope this will continue.

A range of events took place during the year and raised significant sums for the work to continue:

- Over the Christmas period 2015 and into 2016 the 'orange quiz sheets' designed by Robin Gray and Nola McSweeney proved extremely popular once again.
- The traditional annual quiz night masterminded by the same team was held in March at the William Parker School. It proved extremely popular attracting over 30 teams and raised over £2,400.
- A third 'Cheese Fest' organized by Jo Avery raised another £317.
- Most memorably one of our patrons, Dain Jensen ran the infamous Marathon Des Sables across the Sahara with colleague Adam and raised over £4,000.
- A wine tasting evening in July proved extremely popular and raised another £650.
- In September we held a Music quiz which again proved extremely popular and raised over £550.
- The year ended with a very successful Christmas Concert supported by a varied group of musicians, vocalists and choirs which raised £2,500.

- We have also received generous donations from fundraising by the local community and from our partners in the Sierra Leone Hastings Association (UK) and the Church of the Good Shepherd.

Partnership with the Sierra Leone Hastings Association (UK):

We have continued to be privileged to have such good friends amongst the Sierra Leonean diaspora in London. They have been extremely helpful during our discussions with their counterparts in the Sierra Leone Hastings Association (SL).

Yvonne Johnson and Yvette John and others were regular visitors to our events in Hastings, always bringing a choice buffet – to the BBQ, the AGM, the School Soccer Tournament, and the Gala Concert.

We warmly thank the Association and the Church of the Good Shepherd for their generous support and donations throughout the year.

In Conclusion

2016 has been another extremely challenging but successful year. There is no doubt that without the efforts of all of our members and friends in the community we could not have achieved what we have.

We need to ensure that every penny we raise is put to good use and has a maximum and sustained impact. We must maintain the dialogue with the head Man and the local committee members and work toward a better understanding of the priorities and how we can develop sustainable solutions for the future.

I close by thanking my friends and colleagues here, officers on the Committee and Trustees of the Link for their support and hard work throughout the year. Beyond those with specific roles there are many others who attend our rather ad-hoc Ordinary General Meetings and support us at various events and in many different ways during the year.

Richard Homewood,
15 June 2017
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