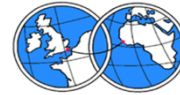




Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link

bringing two communities together



Registered charity no. 1127137

www.hastingshastings.org.uk

Chairperson's Annual Report 2017/18

Introduction

A year starting with optimism with the build up to the tenth anniversary of the twinning link and the news that the teachers exchanges could resume in 2017, went on to bring us some unexpected challenges along the way, with refused visa's, the devastating mudslide and the challenges with the Twin Town Centre.

After a successful trip to Hastings SL in February 2017, which Roger, Isabel and Christine will report on in more detail later, there was disappointment when the SL teachers were refused their visa to return in May. Undeterred by this Roger and Isabel used their persuasive skills to ensure the return visit was able to take place later in the year to a packed programme as usual.

The Link's 10th anniversary celebrations were held in Hastings SL during the February visit and Michael Foster, the then High Sheriff hosted a celebration here in the UK.

Attention was diverted from normal Link business when the devastating mudslides hit Freetown and we launched a disaster appeal. The Hastings Association UK and Church of the Good Shepherd in Romford joined in the fundraising efforts and working with partner charity Build on Books' LorriSpragg, we were able to ensure the funds raised reached the people most in need.

Debates about the Twin Town Centre and its sustainability continued and Christine and her Health Sub-Committee continued to work hard to improve facilities at the Health Centre.

Fundraising has continued with a wide range of activities and an amazing effort by another of our Patrons, Dain Jensen, who not satisfied with last year's Desert trot, took on the challenge of the Coast to Coast walk with a group of friends and raised over £5,600 for the Link.

Success with fundraising always brings its own challenges and that is how to invest the funds wisely to try to build sustainability into the community in Hastings SL and we have debated long and hard over the year. We want to use the funds to support the community but need to be sure they will make a lasting difference. The debates will continue.

Looking ahead the visit this February (2018) has been another huge success thanks to the efforts of Roger, Isabel and Christine. And of course the support from Yvonne and her negotiation skill without which the success of our visits would be much more difficult to achieve.

The Head Man, Abdul Sesay, has been re-elected and efforts have already begun to try to build stronger relationships between him, the Hastings Associations in the UK and SL and the Link to ensure a productive future.

Work is underway on planning the teachers return visit and we have a busy programme of fundraising events already lined up. I am looking forward to another busy and productive year and would like to thank all Trustees and Members for their continuing hard work and commitment to the Link, without which none of this could happen.

Management of the Link

Committee Meetings

Our General Committee met on four 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/Isabel 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 visit to Hastings SL in February 2017 was coupled with the 10th Anniversary of the Twinning of the two towns. Hastings Borough Council's Deputy Mayor, Nigel Sinden 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, Trustees, Patrons and Members of the Link.

Twin Town Centre:

The dialogue with the Hastings Development Committee and the Hastings Association in Sierra Leone and the UK over the needs of the Twin Town Centre has continued at length.

Whilst it is clear was that the TTC needs a major injection of funds to refurbish it and bring it up to a suitable standard for letting as accommodation and for functions, there has been little progress in developing a business plan to ensure it has a sustainable future. Numerous ideas have been submitted by the Hastings Development Committee and have been discussed with the Hastings Association UK. At one stage we had thought we had secured a person who would manage it properly but that did not materialise.

There remains a nervousness about funding this work without the assurance that it can be operated on a business like basis to generate income to sustain its future. During the recent visit members came back with a view that it was almost 'mothballed' and there is clearly a lot of discussion and change needed before we are confident to invest in it.

One positive during the year was that the title to the Twin Town Centre is now formally in the hands of the Hastings Association and the Hastings Development Committee in SL.

I am assured that the Hastings Associations are determined to resolve the matter and our thanks must go to Yvonne and Yvette especially for persevering with this challenge

The discussions will continue.

Health Centre:

The news about the Health Centre is more positive. The refurbishment of the laboratory in the Health Centre and addressing the flooding issues caused by the new boundary wall both funded by the Link were two of the key successes during the year.

and Christine will report in detail on the work with the Health Centre and the local Health Authorities in her report.

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

Schools

Ablly 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.

Roger and Isabel will be reporting in detail on their work and the recent visit. I must thank Isabel and Roger for their continued hard work in making these visits happen and keeping schools on board, in spite of all of the challenges it presents.

Fund Raising

Fundraising efforts continued at a pace during 2017. 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 have also produced a new range of polo and T shirts and a set of new display banners in order to improve the branding of the Link and make it more instantly recognisable in the media and the community.

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 to help raise funds. We must also thank Hastings Borough Council for its continued support even in the face of severe financial constraints it faces. Whilst we understand the need for this support to be reduced next year, it is hoped that they will continue to recognise this is a valuable humanitarian twining link with people in desperate need in our namesake village.

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

- Over the Christmas period 2016 and into 2017 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 33 teams.
- Most memorably one of our patrons, Dain Jensen not satisfied with running the infamous Marathon Des Sables across the Sahara last year, took on the challenge of the Coast to Coast walk with a group of friends.
- A second wine tasting evening in July proved extremely popular.
- In September we held a second Music quiz which again proved extremely popular.
- We have also received further 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

2017 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,
20 March 2018
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