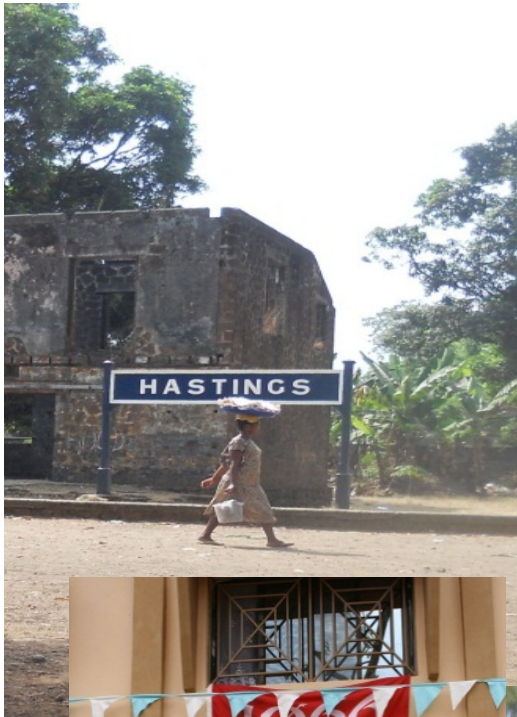


Building Sustainable Futures In Hastings, Sierra Leone. Link Strategy 2022 to 2027



Registered charity no. 1127132

**Hastings Sierra Leone
Friendship Link**

bringing two communities together



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Executive Summary

Links between the towns of Hastings in East Sussex and Hastings in Sierra Leone originated in 2001 when LOAF, a local Christian Charity, began responding to the call for help to repair the ravages of the Rebel War of the 1990s.

Building on this relationship, in 2007 the towns of Hastings East Sussex and Hastings Sierra Leone inaugurated a Civic Partnership and in 2008 the *Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link* became the charitable arm of that Partnership. The organisation focuses on the interrelated sectors of education and training; relieving poverty, sickness and distress; promoting good health; improving living conditions and raising awareness of each other's history and culture.

Thus the Partnership brings together people from different backgrounds, cultures and circumstances to the benefit of all. We believe that by improving quality of life for the long term, empowering children and their families in the area, we can help Hastings realise lasting change.

From 2007 the Link grew from strength to strength and completed a series of major projects including the construction of the Twin Town Community Centre and a large extension to the Health Centre, expanding school links with schools in the UK, improving water supplies and sanitation in schools and developing community projects around waste, recycling, composting and alternative fuels to reduce deforestation and mitigate landslides.

Following the Ebola outbreak which had a devastating effect on the community in the Hastings area, the Link needed to regroup with partners and forge a strategy to re-establish strong communication links, partnership working and agreed priorities to aid the recovery and help them create a sustainable future for themselves.

Progress being made since the Ebola outbreak has been further hindered by the Covid pandemic which disrupted communications, has delayed projects, and most significantly has had a serious impact on our ability to raise funds for future projects.

This strategy provides a road map and platform for dialogue with key partners and the community. It features the Link's plans and aspirations for programming, resource allocation, fundraising and communication. Focussing on these and their interrelationship, with the community we have identified four priority areas for the next five years. Those four priority areas are education, creating livelihoods, promoting health and community engagement and communications. The process for identifying projects within these priority areas was informed by input from the Link Committee, its Members, and the Hastings, Sierra Leone Association in the UK and SL and the Hastings Development Committee in SL. The priority projects identified can be aligned with these priority areas.

These four priority areas align with several of the key United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, especially those relating to Ending Poverty, Good Health and Well-Being, Quality Education, and Decent Work and Economic Growth.

This is a broad, challenging and ambitious strategy. We therefore need to be realistic and clear about what we believe we can help to deliver. We need to ensure that leaders in the local community are engaged and enabled to continue with the work in our absence, by establishing committed groups or teams to take forward each strand of work. Action plans setting out key actions, targets and outcomes for each support this strategy, including communications and fundraising which are vital to provide the resources for the delivery of the strategy.

What is our purpose?

The Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link connects the peoples of Hastings, UK and Hastings, Sierra Leone to promote reconstruction and friendship in the wake of the rebel war. The village of Hastings, Sierra Leone and surrounding communities were all but destroyed by the end of the Rebel War in 2002. Significant progress was being made to rebuild the community with support from the Link and other organisations but the recovery has suffered a serious setback with the Ebola outbreak, most recently the Covid Pandemic.

These have had a huge impact on the work the Link and others had been doing to improve education and learning through its School exchange programme, on the work to improve the Health Centre and efforts to encourage better management and use of the Twin Town Centre. Restricted mobility and the inability to work has had a much broader impact on the whole community and the local economy which now suffers from higher levels of unemployment and extremely low incomes than before the outbreak.

We will continue to focus on our four key objectives but the scale of the challenge the community now faces means we need a sharper focus and clarity over our key priorities within those objectives and clarity over what we want to achieve over the next five years to help develop a sustainable community which can support itself in the future.

What are we trying to do and why?

For the communities we work with in the Hastings area we believe that the advancement of education and training, the relief of poverty by creating better livelihoods and improved health and life expectancy are intrinsically interconnected. Parents with better livelihoods keep their children in school longer and children with a good education get or create better jobs when they become adults and are more aware of the benefits of healthy lifestyles and the prevention of the spread of infection and diseases. Focussing on supporting education, creating livelihoods, and improving health can increase the impact of our efforts. Tackling high infant mortality and combating common infectious diseases is a key element of promoting good health and physical and social well-being. We need to maintain progress with the physical improvements to the Health Centre in Hastings and the facilities it provides. Maximising the utilisation of the Twin Town Centre by the community and extending its flexibility as a community space will also produce significant benefits to the community.

There are therefore, four key Strands to our Strategy, Education, Creating Livelihoods and relieving poverty, promoting health and effective community engagement and communication.

The Four Strands

1. Education Partnerships

The key to successful partnerships in education is to ensure that some needs of both partners are understood and addressed in the process of working together.

In the case of partnerships between schools in the UK and in SL the most apparent contrast is in the desperate need for resources of equipment, materials and staff in SL. Less obvious, though nonetheless real, is the need in the UK for an understanding of global issues among teachers and pupils and an appreciation of the social, cultural and spiritual impoverishment that often accompanies material wealth.

Our partnerships need to aim at a mutuality of benefit.

Needs within UK Schools

To develop *Global Citizenship Outlooks*, for example:

- A positive sense of identity
- An openness to new ideas
- A sense of interdependence
- A desire to make a difference
- Commitments to rights and responsibilities, to peace, to justice and to sustainability

To develop *Global Citizenship Skills*, for example:

- Self-awareness
- Empathy
- Conflict resolution
- Creative thinking
- Critical thinking
- Communicating
- Collaborating
- Taking action

Our UK schools will seek to use the interactions within their partnerships to address some of these issues.

Needs within SL Schools

These same needs exist in SL as much as in the UK, but there are other issues with which schools in the UK have grappled with some success and a sharing of experiences may be of benefit to our partners. We might highlight:

- Involvement of parents in the educational process both before and during the school life of their children
- Encouraging participation in education throughout the Primary stage

- Encouraging participation in education beyond the Primary stage
- The importance of education for girls as a key to raising the aspirations of the next generation
- Techniques for teaching basic language and numerical skills
- The involvement of pupils in the direction of their own learning
- The use of active learning techniques
- Strategies for effective teaching of large groups of children?

These issues will be further explored in sessions with teachers.

UK Partners will continue to address some of the material needs of their partners by fund-raising and donations, for example:

- Stationery requirements
- Books
- Educational equipment
- Water and sanitation
- Building improvements

However, it is vital that none of this is done in a spirit of paternalism. We must at all times seek to avoid generating attitudes of dependence and envy.

We must also bear in mind the devastating effect of the two-term shut-down of schools as a result of the ebola emergency. The consequent interruption to the education of the current generation of pupils is an added blow to a country that had already seen the disruption caused to education during the 10 year Rebel War. Children have been slow to return to education and there have been many instances of teenage pregnancies curtailing the education for girls.

Sanitation in schools in Sierra Leone

Clean water, basic toilets and good hygiene practices are essential for the survival and development of children. According to UNICEF, every day, over 800 children die, worldwide, from preventable diseases caused by the lack of these. It is acknowledged that Sub Saharan Africa, which includes Sierra Leone, lags far behind other continents in addressing the problem.

In Sierra Leone the lack of these basic facilities in our twinned schools is impacting on their education and their futures. Children often miss out on education because they spend hours every day collecting water and are exhausted if and when they get to school. Many older girls have to miss school on a regular basis due to the lack of menstrual hygiene facilities.

Whilst we can't tackle the problem in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa, we can improve the prospects for the future of children in the schools we are twinned with in Hastings, Sierra Leone by ensuring they have a sustainable water supply, good basic sanitation, and hygiene facilities.

Education for future employment

In 2019 the Battle Horticultural Society donated funds to start a project growing vegetables in our partner schools in Sierra Leone. In February 2020 each school was given money to purchase vegetable seeds and take part in "The Seeds Challenge". The results were astonishing. Schools involved both teachers and pupils in responding to the Challenge with great enthusiasm,

identifying patches of rough ground that could be used for planting, clearing the ground, creating raised beds, sowing seeds, weeding and watering the growing crops and harvesting. Some created makeshift greenhouses and built fences to keep animals away from the crops. A plentiful harvest enabled schools to use it in various ways, some selling produce to fund the purchase of teaching materials, some feeding their children, some giving to the needy in their communities. Many saved seed for the next growing season and purchased more and better tools.

A follow-up grant from the Link enabled even greater success during the 2021 and 2022 growing seasons and there are now 30 schools involved in what is titled “The School Farms Project”. We now anticipate that the Project in most participating schools will become self-sustaining and, by involving the community in which the schools are set, will encourage children to consider livelihoods in food production.

In these amazing achievements the Link relies greatly on support from colleagues in Sierra Leone regularly visiting the schools to review progress, provide encouragement and advice, and coordinate the project.

Sierra Leone has two main seasons – the wet and the dry. The real challenge for schools is to maintain a water supply through the dry season to continue producing food. So there is a strong connection between the School Farms Project and the Link’s ambition to provide all schools with a sustainable water supply along with good sanitation.

As our UK students have seen what is being achieved by their Sierra Leone partners more of our own schools **are** getting involved in growing crops. A boost to the sense of mutual benefit.

2. Creating Livelihoods, relieving poverty

In order to create a sustainable future for the Hastings community, alongside our work to improve education we need to develop ways of helping people find work or create their own businesses and in turn boost the local economy.

Improving the income generating abilities of the community is dependent on providing them with improved business skills and access to financial services. The Link will investigate local business opportunities using local resources and raw materials and ways of giving people the skills and knowledge they need to get their businesses up and running and diversify their sources of income. We will also investigate ways of supporting them as they develop their businesses.

Local smallholder farmers often struggle to produce a surplus to sell, or even to produce enough food to feed their families. Farmers often sell their produce to middlemen at very low prices because of the low quantity and quality of their produce. Lack of market information and opportunities makes it difficult for farmers to negotiate from a position of strength and to secure a fair price.

The Seeds Challenge and the School Farms Project have generated a new enthusiasm in horticulture and have demonstrated how people can earn a livelihood from growing and selling crops. Other community groups have joined the project, including the Hastings Gardeners Association and the Hastings Community Learning Centre, further extending the impact of the project in the Hastings community.

We will continue to work with smallholders in the community to increase productivity and the returns achieved on their agricultural enterprises, resulting in improved incomes and food security. We will help them to do this by looking at soil enrichment using home composting to increase yields, investigating improvements to water supply for irrigation, by training them in ways of improving productivity, and by exploring opportunities to provide access to wider markets with better prices.

Improved access to financial services is also key and the Link will work with the Hastings Association and local financial institutions to investigate savings and loans groups or credit unions as ways of giving them access to start up funds.

Encouraging women to set up businesses and generate income can lead to more investment in children's education, health and access to food and nutrition, as well as an improvement in women's involvement in decision making at household level.

3. Promoting Health

High maternal, neo-natal, post-natal and infant mortality, deaths from Malaria, Dysentery, HIV and other infectious diseases were already presenting real challenges for a struggling health care system before the Ebola outbreak and the Covid pandemic which have served to highlight how poorly funded and coordinated it is.

The Link has already invested heavily in the fabric and facilities of the Hastings Health Centre, funding an extension to the existing building, providing additional maternity and delivery facilities, rewiring, repairs to the well, providing a new borehole and the provision of medical equipment and medicines. More recently a separate Triage and isolation unit has been built to segregate infectious diseases from the maternity facilities.

The Link continues to work with the Health Centre Management Committee, other agencies and charities to ensure there is a clear strategy for the future development and management of the Health Centre and the services it can offer the community.

Funding for fit for purpose equipment for the maternity unit and improvements in health care facilities will continue to be a priority within the context of that overall strategy.

On a broader front we will work with the Hastings Association and the local community to investigate improvements to the water supply to improve general hygiene and food safety to reduce the spread of infectious diseases. We will also work with the schools to ensure healthy lifestyles; hygiene awareness and the prevention of the spread of infection and disease are included in the core syllabus.

4. Community engagement and communication

To be able to deliver on these priorities effective communication and effective engagement of the community are essential. We need to work with the Hastings Association, the Hastings Development Committee and the Head Man to open channels of communication with the community leaders and engage with them to ensure that they agree with the priorities we have identified.

The Ebola outbreak and more recently the Covid pandemic had hampered communication and prevented visits to and from Sierra Leone. Intermittent communication made it difficult to keep abreast of developments and the current situation in the Hastings area. An initial challenge now effective communication has been restored and once a visit can be arranged will be to re-establish engagement with the community, understand the current state of play in all of the above areas, and review and confirm or adjust the priorities and related action plans and firm up and agree the strategy with all key partners.

The random and intermittent communication during the Ebola outbreak had detracted from a coherent and overall strategy of action and had led to the Link reacting to individual requests which may not have actually reflected the priorities of the community as a whole. It is essential therefore that requests for support and assistance are channelled appropriately through the Hastings Association, the Hastings Development Committee, the Head Man and the Friendship Link so that they can be evaluated and prioritised effectively and we do not simply accede to the requests of those who are able to communicate directly or 'shout the loudest'.

Where are we now?

The Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link has progressed step-by-step to its current position. Since 2001, initially LOAF and subsequently the Link have helped fund the following projects:

- re-building 13 bridges around the town destroyed by the rebels, so that villagers could move around the village more easily, get to work and begin to lead normal lives again
- building a multi-purpose Twin Town Community Centre, which now plays an important role in village life, with a resourced library and sleeping accommodation. In time we hope it will also become a source of income
- doubling the size of the community health centre which has to serve 20,000 people in the Hastings area
- constructing a perimeter wall around both the Twin Town centre and the Health Centre to provide security and prevent 'land grab'
- providing much needed medical supplies to help with care and treatment of mothers and babies and others suffering from malaria, HIV and other infections
- sending shipments of protective clothing and hygiene equipment to help the health centre continue its vital work whilst mainstream resources are directed toward coping with the Ebola crisis
- bringing 12 pairs of schools/academies into partnership
- exchange visits for teachers took place in 2011,2012,2013,2014 and funding had been achieved for another in 2015 which was aborted as a result of the Ebola outbreak.
- A small party visited in 2016 to re-assess the situation after Ebola and teacher exchange visits resumed in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020
- sending shipments of educational materials and class books to partner schools
- undertaking curriculum projects and other activities within the partnership schools/academies
- establishing International Pupil Councils here and in SL
- funding the digging of wells in two schools, a piped water supply in a third and toilet blocks in two others
- projects to encourage improvements in waste management, more recycling, and composting to reduce pollution of streams and rivers and contamination of valuable farming land
- building units for biogas generation for cooking and hot water and to reduce deforestation and pollution from wood and charcoal fires
- repairing the water tower at the health centre, damaged by a falling tree - to provide a water supply to maintain hygiene.
- sending funds to provide food aid to those in greatest need in the community during the Ebola crisis
- Sending funds to help victims of the mudslides in Freetown to help them rebuild their lives and livelihoods.
- in 2020 we carried out a full survey of the Health Centre and established and costed physical repair and improvement works required to deliver the vision.

- launched the Seeds challenge to encourage schools to grow their own crops and learn agricultural skills.
- further developed the project into the School Farms Project and engaged over 30 schools in growing crops and generating income from excess production to provide materials for the schools and seeds for future years
- funded the completion of an additional maternity wing and delivery ward at the Health Centre
- funded a borehole and solar pump in place of the failed well at the Health Centre
- funded wells and water towers in four schools as part of the project to improve hygiene and sanitation in all of the twinned schools.
- funded the construction of a new triage and isolation unit at the Health Centre to separate patients with infectious diseases from the expectant mothers and children.

What we have achieved so far is extremely rewarding and is enriching both their lives and ours. We remain committed to continuing this work into the future. We need to build on our ability to listen to, understand and respond to the needs of the Hastings community if we are to maximum effect. We must use experience gained from one project to inform and develop future projects, while forming partnerships with other organisations to help us achieve our goals where it is appropriate.

We need to have a clear Strategy and an Action Plan that not only meets the aspirations of the community and our aims, but is also able to demonstrate clarity to potential donors about the things their money can achieve on the ground.

We have come to a pivotal stage in our development. We have the enthusiasm and ambition, but we need to ensure we also have the capacity and expertise to raise the funds and the resources to deliver the objectives. If we can achieve this we will be in a position to dramatically increase the number of people whose lives will significantly improve as a result of working with us.

What we will do to get there.

In order to deliver this ambitious strategy, over the next five years we will:

1. Education

All that follows below has to be seen in the context of what may be possible following the Ebola outbreak and the Covid pandemic.

Number of Partnerships

Having maintained and extended the number of partnerships existing before the Ebola crisis, and maintained and actually extended those partnerships during the Covid pandemic, we will continue to make schools and academies aware of the benefits of partnerships and seize any opportunities to expand their number.

How Will the Momentum of Partnerships be maintained?

In 2016 a member of the HSLFL Committee was recruited to work with the existing Education Coordinator to safeguard succession. This has proved to be a fruitful partnership. The volume of work involved would justify the recruitment of a further team member.

Representatives of each partnership are continuing to meet at least 4 times a year in the UK under the chairmanship of the Education Coordinator (UK).

Representatives of each partnership continue to meet a similar number of times under the chairmanship of the Education Coordinator (SL).

We will seek appropriate opportunities to keep all the Headteachers/Principals in Hastings aware of the potential of partnerships.

The IPCs will continue to meet to discuss suitable activities for their schools/academies

UK schools/academies will continue to be asked to contract to fund the SL Coordinator's expenses to the tune of £60 per school per year as part of their partnership commitment.

Exchanges of Teachers

We will continue to organise an exchange of teachers each year.

We will encourage each UK School to commit to cover the expenses of such exchanges either by fund-raising efforts or by seeking grants.

These exchanges will be organised and accompanied by a member of the HSLFL Committee specifically tasked to do so and whose expenses will be negotiated with that committee. Input from the SL Coordinator will determine and facilitate the programme of visits in SL and visa and transport arrangements for SL teachers visiting the UK.

Curriculum Programmes

Partnership schools/academies are committed to communicate effectively with their partners to determine the content and range of at least one joint curriculum project each year. From year to year these can either be a development of work in the previous year or an exploration of an entirely new topic.

SL and UK Coordinators will continue to facilitate communication when it cannot be achieved directly.

These projects will continue to be designed with a view to making an impact on the whole of each school involved and to engender global perspectives.

These partnership curriculum projects will generally be within the context of travel grants available from NGOs and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Education coordinators in the UK and in SL will continue to play advisory roles in this task.

Teacher Training

It has been agreed with Headteachers/Principals and Education Administrators in SL that it would be helpful for SL teachers to be given the opportunity to experience and discuss how certain curriculum areas are taught in the UK.

The UK coordinator will be responsible for providing training both in SL and in the UK as opportunities arise and needs are identified.

Such training will be set in the context of minimal availability of equipment.

The aim will be to provide such training during each exchange visit, making use of the Twin Town Centre when in SL and the expertise of visiting teachers.

The training will be of such a nature as to enable participants to engage in Continuous Professional Development with their peers.

School Buildings and Premises

Whilst there will be no expectation for any UK partner school/academy to fund physical improvements at their SL partner's premises, there is no doubt that the lack of adequate, well maintained physical facilities can have an adverse impact on the standard of education and the children's ability to learn. The aspiration has to be that all partner schools will be well maintained and have a water supply and sanitation.

During 2017 we sought professional advice to develop a realistic strategy for assessing and providing for the needs for basic sanitation in each of our partner schools in SL. The main fund-raising efforts of HSLFL are now being directed to this task.

Schools will be free to consider providing in any way they feel appropriate to benefit their partner schools. Experience, however, has shown that individual and uncoordinated actions to

improve just one school can fuel unhelpful jealousies and expectations. A coordinated and funded programme can help prevent this and for this reason the HSLFL committee should be consulted regarding any such proposals.

The Schools Sanitation Project aims to improve the prospects for the future of children in the schools we are twinned with in Hastings, Sierra Leone by ensuring they have a sustainable water supply, good basic sanitation and hygiene facilities.

We have already had a survey of the schools undertaken to establish what facilities they currently have and don't have. We are now working with the schools to plan how we can improve the facilities and give the children a better chance for the future.

2. Creating Livelihoods

By 2023 we will aim to have agreed a business plan for the Twin Town Centre that will enable it to become a viable and sustainable community asset providing support and facilities for the community and accommodation for visitors.

By 2023 we will aim to have identified expertise in business development to work with the local community to identify business opportunities using local resources and raw materials.

By 2023 we will aim to have worked with local financial institutions, the Hastings Development Committee and the Hastings Association to assess the viability of a credit union of savings and loans scheme to support new business enterprises.

By 2023 we will aim to have engaged with women in the community and highlighted opportunities for them to establish and engage in businesses activities.

By 2023 the School Farms project will be self-sustaining and further expanded to additional schools.

By 2023 we will aim to have engaged with local smallholders and provided advice on soil enrichment, improving crop yields and identifying markets for produce.

By 2023 50% of smallholders will aim to have established composting facilities and have increased crop yields.

By 2025 we will aim to have assisted with the construction of a market building to enable smallholders to sell their produce locally obtain better prices for their produce.

By 2025 we will aim to have provided advice and guidance to 20 local people enabling them to set up their own businesses and sustain or expand them.

3. Improving Health

By 2022 we will aim to have engaged with the Health Centre Management Committee and other contributing organisations reached an understanding of the strategy and vision for the future of the Health Centre and the work / resources required to deliver them.

By 2022 we will aim to have identified requirements for equipment and supplies for the Health Centre and agreed with partners the potential supply chains for them.

By 2023 we will aim to have agreed with the Hastings Development Committee and the Hastings Association and the local community the requirements for a sustainable water supply to the village

By 2025 we will aim to have contributed along with other organisations to provide a sustainable water supply to the village.

By 2025 we will aim to have contributed along with other organisations to further repair and refurbishment works to and equipment in the Health Centre

4. Community engagement and communication

By 2022 we will aim to have a clearer understanding of the current economic and social conditions in Hastings SL and have re-established clear communications channels.

By 2023 we will have engaged with the Hastings Development Committee and Hastings Association and agreed or revised the priorities in the Strategy.

By 2023, in order to deliver the strategy, we will also aim to have begun work to attract corporate sponsorship from local businesses.

By 2023 we will aim to have agreed priorities for action and all parties will have a clear understanding of the channels to be used for raising requests for support and resources for projects.



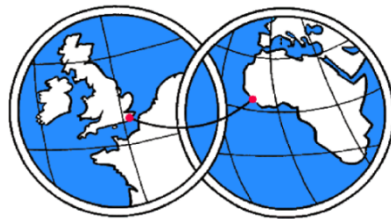
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

At the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015, world leaders adopted the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030.



What are the Sustainable Development Goals?

The Sustainable Development Goals, otherwise known as the [Global Goals](#), build on the [Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\)](#), eight anti-poverty targets that the world committed to achieving by 2015. The MDGs, adopted in 2000, aimed at an array of issues that included slashing poverty, hunger, disease, gender inequality, and access to water and sanitation. Enormous progress has been made on the MDGs, showing the value of a unifying agenda underpinned by goals and targets. Further details of the individual goals can be found by clicking on the icons above.



Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link

bringing two communities together

Registered Charity No 1127137 www.hastingshastings.org.uk

Patrons: Peter Penfold, former British High Commissioner in Sierra Leone,
Michael J.Foster DL, and Dain Jensen.

Chairman: Richard Homewood 07712 088648. Vice Chairman: Derek Tomblin 01424 753768.

Secretary: Robin Gray 01424 436603. Treasurer: Martin Copland 07890 407421.

Schools Liaison: Roger Mitchell 01424 422299, Isabel Hodger 07702 563562.

Membership Sec: Jacqui Homewood 07740 965198. Health Working Party: Christine Lane 07714 557037.

Fundraising: Nola McSweeney 01424 751295