



Chairperson's Annual Report 2018/19

Introduction

Another year of highs and lows, progress and setbacks as members have worked hard to improve the quality of life and prospects for our twin town community.

February 2018 saw a party of 16 visit Sierra Leone to continue work on the projects, including 12 teachers from twinned schools in the UK who worked through an extensive education programme devised in partnership with Francis Mason and including Isabel's hugely successful Math Workshops. Christine and Richard Lane were able to work with the Health Centre and the Twin Town Centre and further build relationships between the Head Man, the Hastings Associations in the UK and SL and the Link to ensure a productive future.

There was however disappointment when the SL teachers were unable to secure their visas for the planned return in June. Undeterred by this Roger and Isabel used their persuasive skills to ensure the return visit was able to take place later in the year and they were treated to a packed programme as usual in October.

Undaunted by the withdrawal of support for school twinning by the Brighton Academy Trust, Isabel has worked hard with Roger to recruit new schools to the twinning programme and has helped schools secure British Council Funding for exchange visits during 2019/20.

Although the cost of flights meant no teachers were able to visit Sierra Leone in February 2019, a small group had another successful trip to Hastings to further progress ongoing projects. Isabel, Christine and Richard will report on these in more detail later.

The year saw the launch of the fundraising campaign for the Schools' Sanitation Project, after a survey of our twinned schools identified a clear need to improve water supplies, hygiene facilities and sanitation. The launch of the campaign seems to have galvanised people into action with schools and local organisations raising funds for the cause. Richard Lane was able to progress discussion on the project during the visit in February this year and link up with another charity, Welthungerhilfe, who had recently installed a network of water pipes around Hastings village. We are hoping to begin work on the project soon in partnership with them.

Christine and the Health sub-committee have continued to attract support for the Health Centre and improved relationships with the new Medical Officers in Sierra Leone has enabled fruitful discussion on how the facilities and services can be further improved. /alongside this the Link has continued its investment in the fabric of the buildings and facilities for the community.

Debates about the Twin Town Centre and its sustainability have continued with hopes raised by the involvement of Frederick Coker to try to begin to operate it on a more commercial basis.

With limited success so far it is clearly going to be an uphill struggle but we are determined to persist with it, with the help of the Hastings Association in the UK and SL.

Fundraising activities have continued with a wide range of activities and continued support from our Patrons and local organisations.

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.

Work is underway on planning the Sierra Leone teachers return visit next month 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.

Governance of the Link

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/Isabel respectively.

Trustees Meetings

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

The Trustees are about to begin work on a review and refresh of the Link Strategy and we will be consulting the Hastings SL community, our partner organisations and Link members on what they see as important for improving their future prospects. We need to further develop and refine our Safeguarding Policy to ensure it is fit for purpose.

I must thank Robin for his continued hard work as honorary secretary, which must prove extremely frustrating at times.

Partnership Activities with the Community of Hastings Sierra Leone

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 will continue to need an injection of funds for the foreseeable future to bring it up to a suitable standard for letting as accommodation and for functions, we must still aim for it to become self-sustaining in the longer term so that our fundraising efforts can be directed to other projects.

The involvement of Frederick Coker has provided improved hope that we will achieve that goal in the long term but there is still a need to help the Hastings Development Committee and the Hastings Association UK move in that direction.

I am assured that the Hastings Associations in the UK and SL are determined to help us 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 laboratory in the Health Centre is now functioning and investment in a new roof and other refurbishments, along with supplies of equipment have improved the facilities and the services offered to the community significantly.

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.

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

Schools

Isabel and Roger have been joined by Mandy Hinxman and Braidie Paton to help with the workload and the team 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.

Isabel will be reporting in detail on their work and the recent visit. I must thank Isabel and Roger, and now Mandy and Braidie 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 Robin's son 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 to help raise funds.

We must also thank Hastings Borough Council for its past support and accept that in the face of severe financial constraints it faces it will not be able to offer that support in the future. A range of fundraising events took place during the year and raised significant sums for the work to continue:

- Over the Christmas period 2018 and into 2019 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 a full house once again.
- Our wine tasting evening in July again proved extremely popular, raising even more money last year.
- In September we held another Music quiz which again proved extremely popular.
- In November we held our second Charity Ball which in spite of some concerns raised a record amount. Our thanks go once more to The Kytes for their performance and support for our cause.
- We have also received further generous donations from fundraising by the local community, local organisations, local churches, our patrons 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 have been regular visitors to our events in Hastings, always bringing a choice buffet along with them.

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

In Conclusion

2018/19 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,
10 May 2019
richardhomewood@sky.com