

Community imagines Hastings' future

By Jonathan Williams

A recent exhibition at Hastings Trust combined architects' eye-catching visions for Hastings and St Leonards with a lo-fi interactive display (map and sticky notes) of community members' suggestions for improving the area.

The "So Create A Difference" exhibition was organised by Hastings Urban Design Group under the RIBA's local initiative fund and was first displayed in Priory Meadow in April. Proposals from 13 local and regional architects and designers included a pedestrianised Hastings seafront with new trams, refurbishment of the Lido site to create a modern bathing pool, an infinity ice rink in West St Leonards and attention-grabbing student accommodation. Architects HazleMcCormackYoung also joined a long line of dreamers to reimagine Hastings Pier as an undulating "sculptural caterpillar" that would move with the tide.

Perhaps the most striking and whimsical exhibit was DD Architects' "Kype Steps to Nowhere" - a stairway to the open sky, carved into a series of huge, precariously balanced solid blocks jutting out from West Hill. While hard to imagine such a project ever gaining planning permission, the audacious design admirably fulfilled its aim to "recreate the engineering marvels of the Victorian period", taking Hastings' much-loved funicular railways as a starting point.

Rhonda Ellard of Hastings Trust said there had been plenty of interest in the map display from passers-by and that local people were keen to share their ideas. Suggestions for a market in Bottle Alley (the beachfront space beneath the promenade) had stimulated lively discussions among exhibition visitors, said Ms Ellard.

Sticky notes from residents argued both for and against permanent market structures, claimed a white floor would make the alley more inviting and pushed for the to include performance areas.

On the whole, the community's suggestions steered clear of the professional designers' statement pieces, opting instead for practical plans to improve everyday liveability. There were requests for showers and drinking fountains on the beach, play/hangout spaces, exercise parks, allotments and a park and ride scheme for commuters. The future imagined by the community also emphasised creativity through art hubs, designated performance and busking posts and a legal graffiti wall. Notes ranged in tone from the quietly ironic ("A harbour?") to extremely enthusiastic ("MORE CYCLE LANES! like Amsterdam! haha!")

Hastings Trust's Development Officer Jon Aldenton said, "At Hastings Trust, we want to make sure that what happens in the future is based on local demand and need. The idea behind the exhibition is to help the charity set an agenda for Hastings and itself, and to move forward on a firm base."

There are plans to take the exhibition to local schools and colleges in the future. Meanwhile, members of Hastings Trust (membership is free to local residents) are invited to a meeting on 30 September at the Masonic Hall to evaluate the proposals. Those who did not make it to the exhibition are encouraged to bring their suggestions on the night.

More Hastings Trust news here:
www.hastingstrust.net/news-2

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