



**Trinity Triangle  
Heritage Action Zone  
Year one review  
2020-2021**



## **Introduction**

None of us predicted the dramatic changes of 2020. We started the year with open, active and people filled high streets; albeit grappling with the shift to online retail and impacts of austerity. We ended the year with Christmas cancelled, businesses closed, and footfall dramatically low as people stayed at home. Our busy streets and town, country, and world changed in a multitude of ways (possibly forever) by Covid19.

As Hastings lurched from the town with the lowest rates of Covid in the UK, to one of the highest by end of the year, so many activities became unobtainable - having our children educated at school, being able to attend cultural events, go into a shop, meet up over a coffee, socialise with friends, open businesses, get on public transport or hug. The economy nosedived, unemployment soared, communities clapped, companies that have been part of our high street for many generations folded.

Amidst all of this, we are incredibly proud that we have managed to keep our Trinity Triangle Heritage Action Zone (TTHAZ) program mostly on track and deliver as expected and adapt to the new normal. We are frankly astounded that local businesses have responded to our grant programme and that we have created any kind of buzz around the Trinity Triangle at a time when the town feels so eerily quiet. We are delighted that we have managed to engage, pay, and profile artists, at a point where work for local creatives was at best in incredibly short supply.

It has been a delight to fill the Observer Building with people, in a socially distanced and safe way, when the public were barely going out at all. The hallmark of the programme so far has been its flexibility and responsiveness, and this has proved to create great outcomes. From the start-up of Isolation Station Hastings to the fabulous Wondergolf in the Observer Building, our support has helped get new things happening, bringing both digital and physical floorspace into use in creative, adventurous, and playful ways. We have managed to leverage an additional £3.8M above the planned match funding that will allow us to renovate more floors of the Observer Building by March 2022.

As Historic England will be aware, to involve, empower, and engage people to create a genuine community led project is considerably harder and more time and resource intensive than the more traditional structure. We have spent a huge amount of energy this year designing all of our partnership boards, engagement routes, and finding creative ways to reach groups that would typically be considered 'hard to reach'. We have supported our various partners and stakeholders to understand and meet all of the requirements of this program and count the fact we have a full set of documents required by Historic England completed, to a high standard, as a major achievement of the year.

We would like to acknowledge the tremendous effort made by partners, supporters, volunteers and businesses engaged in this program. To have so much to report despite the pandemic is testament to all of their efforts. We just could not have done it without the magnificent community around us.

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*"The difference that the focus on the Trinity Triangle has made, even in a year where Covid has caused havoc, is so palpable already. People talk about the America Ground and Trinity Triangle in a way that shows they are starting to understand the history and heritage of the area. I am so proud to have played a small part in that as a heritage steward and ward councillor. Local businesses are starting to work together, and the area is gaining a reputation for creativity, great exhibitions, culture, and colour. The community are leading the change and that is so exciting to see. Historic England and Heart of Hastings, you are transforming one of the historically most depressed parts of town into an area we all want to hang out in. That is an amazing achievement outside of a global pandemic, and a phenomenal one within it."*

***Judy Rogers, Councillor Castle Ward (including Trinity Triangle),  
Cabinet Member Hastings Borough Council and Former Mayor of Hastings.***

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Key successes**

- Over £3m more match funding raised than originally planned. This allowed us to respond to needs in other parts of the programme where grants or other funding became much harder to find.
- A vibrant creative program delivered that included: a radio station of creative and artistic opportunities to connect with others live streamed from Facebook during and beyond the initial lock down (Isolation Station Hastings), exhibitions, compositions, street art, a pop up crazy golf installation and businesses using their shop windows for a family-friendly advent calendar walk.
- 7 local musicians received grants under our pilot cultural programme with a total value of £6,400. Many other creative professionals supported via our meanwhile space programme and neighbourhood stories projects.
- Major work underway to restore the Alley between the Observer Building and the triangle, and to secure the cliff which we discovered during initial surveys, was in need of stabilisation.
- Heritage steward training held, 7 volunteers stewards recruited and trained plus 5 staff members undertook training. The core streets of TTHAZ have already been surveyed by our volunteers.
- Community engaged in the project in a range of ways including deciding our grants, guiding our decisions on our partners' board, guiding priorities and design through our investigations, as heritage stewards, as audience and contributors to cultural program, as participants in playful activities, on tours of the Observer building and wider area. As beneficiaries to projects funded through local representative groups for hard to reach communities.
- Neighbourhood stories – 5 grants allocated to engage new groups in the Trinity Triangle - Untold Stories, Project ArtWorks (people with complex needs) , Sea Beneath, MSL, Wondergolf, Hastings ADVENTure, Hastings Women's Voice. Plus Independents Day event – history and heritage of America Ground
- 10 businesses enquired about, and 2 applied for, built fabric grants.
- 2 grants made for improvements to public spaces for the Lower Alley and Caves and Trinity Town House courtyard.

This brought in additional funding from the accelerated town deal fund, which will make the Alley a better community space, bring 4 cave spaces into use and develop 10 Claremont into a shop with a workshop, new artist learning/workspace in adjoining stables at Rose Cottage.

- Project partners reacted quickly to flex their plans to Covid and found engaging and creative ways to meet the initial targets and outcomes, despite an entirely different context to that envisaged when application made and funds awarded. For example, L&L supported Isolation Station to provide blended community events, to replace the planned summer programme of activation.
- Our Digital program evolved in light of the pandemic to explore ways digital platforms can engage people in the area, for example through digital, interactive tours and to support local businesses. We hope to develop these projects over the coming months to support the adaptation of our high street to ongoing digital trends, accelerated by COVID19.

- Project partners, grant recipients and stakeholder groups were supported to undertake all of the necessary project scoping, planning and monitoring elements required to articulate, plan, evaluate and report on all elements of the project.
- TTHAZ has helped to influence change beyond our programme: to influence the Town Deal (we are involved in two projects that have been included in the Investment Plan submitted in January 2021), we are consulting on a feeding into Hastings / Bexhill Local plans and supporting fundraising efforts of local churches.
- Preparatory work undertaken on public realm and other projects, including review of Cambridge Road (recommendations now going out for further public consultation), plans developed and prepared for consultation on partial pedestrianisation of Trinity Triangle roads, consultations on a maintenance club for the neighbourhood and an innovative neighbourhood investment mechanism.

### **Key Challenges**

- Working out how to monitor footfall has been a challenge although we have solved that through accessing the town wifi network to identify pedestrians to the area (and their postcodes) via mobile phone signals.
- Obtaining feedback from the public in terms of public perceptions of the area has been a challenge as we had originally envisaged street surveys conducted by our team and volunteers and Covid has largely (although not completely) upset these plans.
- Whilst we exceeded match funding through funds raised for the Observer Building, anticipated funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund for 12 Claremont was affected as they refocused their funds towards Covid.
- Initially envisaged digital program needed to be reconfigured although new program is more appropriate and more responsive to community needs.
- Construction has been unable to progress as planned due to Covid on the Observer Building, although the floorspace planned to be brought back into use has been utilized as a temporary exhibition, performance and interactive play space. Plans further delayed by fact construction firms could not estimate materials costs until Brexit completed.
- Heritage skills training program envisaged being delivered in the college has been delayed due to late recruitment of Heritage Development Officer by Hastings Borough Council but HDO now in post and training is in development.

## 1. Physical Interventions

### The Observer Building



*Just before opening in the autumn of 1924.*



The Observer Building is the former headquarters of the Hastings & St Leonards Observer newspaper. This stunning Henry Ward designed building has been described by the BBC as ‘the most imposing building in Hastings’. Plans for the lower parts of the building include a CrossFit gym, brewery tap-room, a café, and a creative digital hub. The upper floors will feature 14 offices, 15 affordable rental flats, and a roof terrace bar. <https://theobserverbuilding.org.uk/our-plans/>

Initial plans for this funding were focused on bringing 400sqm back into permanent use as part of the social space for the building during year 1. The opportunity to extend the phase 1 scheme with significant match funding through South East Local Enterprise Partnership, led to some delay in order to achieve the full planning permission (granted Sept 2020). The tender deadline had to be extended because Brexit uncertainty made it challenging for contractors to obtain clear prices for materials due to the potential

variations in the costs involved. Three tenders were received 22 January 2021. After value engineering, a contractor will be appointed and work is due to commence on site in early March.

In order to make use of the building before construction the site was made into a 9-hole miniature golf course called Wonder Golf. This exhibition was inspired by Hastings heritage and reputation as a great place for miniature golf (indeed, we have hosted the world crazy golf championships, the flagship event in the miniature golf annual calendar, every year since 2003). Local artists, designers and food outlets were involved to make a unique, COVID safe, participative outing for people of all ages. 1,853 tickets were sold in two weeks of trading. It was due to run for 4 weeks but was forced to close just before Christmas due to COVID Tier 4 restrictions.

Over 28 days (7/12/20 – 3/1/21) more than 9,500 people were reached by the Wonder Golf Facebook posts. In under a month, the page acquired 743 followers and over 3000 engagements. Instagram attracted 745 followers. 20 local businesses and freelance traders were involved in the event pre-production. A team of 8 local performers and 2 costumiers were employed to host and dress the event team in an entertaining yet covid-safe manner. The full team included: 1 x project manager, 1 x creative lead and environment designer, 1 x graphics designer, 13 x creative and technology team for set design, 8 x build crew, 5 x services and hire companies. In the run up to and during the exhibition, 708 followers were acquired on Instagram, with 632 plays of our top video and an average of more than 50 likes per post.

The OB has been also been used for 2 art exhibitions, 2 filming hires, and an extraordinary ‘blended’ event run by Hastings Emerging Futures, which included 20 people safely spaced in the Alley Hall and a further 20 ‘zooming’ in on a big screen to create together in real time a map of our community networks supported by gaming company Free Ice Cream . Feedback from those involved in delivering these projects included:

*“Working in the OB was a really positive experience when filming two music videos for Irish artist Flynn. It's a beautiful and unique space and the team were incredibly helpful and supportive with all our requests. We learned a lot about the history of the building and surrounding areas and built our confidence in this part of Hastings as a creative hub”.*

**Dan Matthews - Isolation Station**

*“Prior to visiting the OB and Gotham alley I had a somewhat negative impression of Hastings. However, visting the building, chatting to Jay, as well as some of the local business owners on coffee runs & a quick trip to the record store round the corner my impression of Hastings and the area that the Observer Building is in has improved dramatically. I look at it now as a community, full of character and welcoming individuals. Jay gave me an insight into what the building was built for, and how it got to become the building it now is, as well as their plans for the future.”*

**Jordan Lorence (Anti-Drug Video)**

Whilst we have not met the original floorspace target to bring 400sqm into use this year, longer term, and within the life of the program, we now know we will significantly exceed this target as we had an initial target to raise £400,000 of match funding and in fact have raised over £3m above this which means that we now have funds in place to complete the full 4000sqm building in full –a target we expected to meet over the course of the program rather than in the first year.

## **12 Claremont**

Work on 12 Claremont is due to start next year. Plans for this 5-storey historic building include artists workspace, live-work apartments, a gallery and an events space.

As described in the challenge section, our original funding plans from NHLF were waylaid by COVID19. However, some initial development funding from Architectural Development Fund has been secured and 12 Claremont is one of the key projects within the Town to Sea Inclusive & Creative Quarter which Heart of Hastings and partners put forward to the Town Deal. This was successfully included in the Town Investment Plan submitted to government on 28 January 2021. We remain on track for construction to begin in FY2. In the meantime, the space has been brought into use as temporary gallery (awaiting renovation) during this year.

### **The Alley, Cliff, Caves, 10 Claremont and Rose Cottage**

Nestled behind Claremont for close to 170 years, The Alley is one of Hastings’ hidden historic gems. With no claim of public or private ownership. It is cared for by its neighbouring building owners and tenants. Surrounding the lower Alley there is a collection of spaces which include five caves hewn into the rock of St Michael’s Cliff, Rose Cottage - a Victorian stable block and a patio courtyard to the rear of 10 Claremont’s shop and basement space.

“Social Spaces” funding from Historic England and an Accelerator grant from the Hastings Town Deal fund has enabled the refurbishment of the Lower Alley, caves, 10 Claremont, patio courtyard and Rose Cottage stables space. Landscaping works have been commissioned to connect the Alley with a wider greening vision for the town centre and Historic England has also stepped into the breach funding essential works on the Alley cliff face to ensure stabilising safety works.

There has been a long process of engaging adjacent freeholders, tenants, and local users with planning the future for the Alley. Due for completion in March/April 2021, this collection of spaces now presents an exciting array of commercial and learning opportunities for Hastings creative retailers, craftspeople and educators.



The vision is for a new creative and inclusive neighbourhood project, centred around common ownership for the common good, creating positive ways for people to live and work that enable them to thrive. A local contractor, Kent & Sussex Geotechnical, began the major works on cliff and cave stabilisation on 1 Feb. The Lower Alley works have created 10 building/contractor jobs, since December 2020. Additionally, a team of 5 construction jobs are attached to Geotech specialist engineering to work Feb-March 2021. The

Improvement will see 686 sqm of space, including 319 sqm of economically productive space and 367 sqm of new amenity space coming into usage in spring 2021.

### **Public Realm improvements - Reconfiguration of Cambridge Road/ Trinity Triangle roads**

Consultants have been engaged to design options to improve Cambridge Road and have provided a set of recommendations which will go out for wider community consultation. Similarly, plans have been drawn up for partial pedestrianisation of Robertson Street and the roads around the Trinity Triangle (pictured on cover page), which will go out for public consultation.

### **Built Fabric Grants**

Two built fabric grants have been awarded, following 10 initial enquiries. One is for Trinity Town House a striking building in a prominent position – being visible from the seafront. The team at TTH will open an inclusive venue with a reputation for creative and fun events and are restoring the building to be more in keeping with its heritage location. Another prominent building also awarded a grant has delayed their funding, as a more urgent need to address collapsing pavement lights has arisen, that is likely to require grant financing. Options for this are being explored.

## 2. Cultural Programming

### This year we have

- Set up cultural partners group who completed an ambitious cultural strategy 2020-2024. The group represents over 25 local organisations and creative professionals, from a range of disciplines and including all local cultural institutions and representatives of our main festivals.
- Hosted a range of exhibitions in the Observer Building and 12 Claremont including the interactive Wondergolf exhibition, innovative installations for Coastal Currents festival and a residency by local artist Ben Fenton who has produced a work inspired by the Observer Building unique spaces.
- Awarded a series of grants to 7 musicians to create work inspired by the heritage of the area in collaboration with the community, working with the LGBT+ community, care home residents, people with physical and learning disabilities, an intergenerational project with a local primary school and the local men's shed for elderly men at risk of isolation.
- Funded Isolation Station Hastings which has run a full cultural programme to connect residents of the town during the pandemic including Weekly art classes with artist Sue Tilley, Choir sessions with local gospel and world music choir leader Juliet Russell, live streamed daily through first lockdown and still running and followed by 6,724 people  
<https://www.facebook.com/isolation.station.hastings/>
- Awarded a series of grants to tell stories based on the Trinity Triangle from a range of perspectives including its suffragist history and the impacts of climate.
- Hastings big ADVENTure advent calendar – new work of art unveiled every day for 24 days, showcased in shop windows across the Trinity Triangle area and beyond, encouraging families to explore the town in a socially distanced and fun way  
<https://www.instagram.com/hastingsadvent/>

### 3. Community Engagement

Our community engagement has been as creative as our cultural programme and has included:

1. Independence Day event at the America Ground, informing, educating & engaging the public in the heritage of the area. Full coverage of the Event from Isolation Station Hastings can be seen here <https://fb.watch/3ivl7cls8E/>
2. Discovery Walk – visiting sites relevant to the Trinity Triangle Heritage Action Zone, preceded by talk by local historian. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxI2f0h4iu9f7xIzE-ME1gw>
3. Walk generating an initial map of ideas with promotion to encourage more people to add to it - <https://www.commonwealth.org.uk/hastings-emerging-futures-map-of-ideas/>
4. Hastings Emerging Futures ‘Hastings Town Centre’ online event: approx. 90 people attended via zoom webinar and facebook, and generated lots of imaginative ideas for the future.
5. Hastings Emerging Futures, ‘Changing Hastings’ (gentrification/housing) event: Approx 175 people attended via zoom webinar and facebook. They have now joined the mailing list ‘next steps’ we will try to engage members from events in rest of project.
6. Common Treasury <https://www.facebook.com/commonwealth.org.uk> and Changing Hastings channels <https://www.facebook.com/changinghastings> – where conversations from the emerging future events is still playing out.
7. Tours of the Observer Building, and Trinity Triangle Heritage Action Zone.
8. We have shaped our programme in response to local feedback – including redesigning our digital programme and a new investigation/project around pedestrianisation.
9. 12 trained, volunteer heritage stewards have undertaken heritage surveys on the buildings in the area, noting what heritage features they have, what heritage skills and techniques would be needed to restore and maintain buildings, and feeding this data directing into the heritage skills training programme under development.
10. Independent Grant Panel and Partnership board set up, meeting regularly and working effectively, representing key community groups and organisations.
11. Broader partnerships being formed across the area. E.g. with relevant community groups and artists to help us ensure that full diversity of the community are meaningfully engaged with program, and able to input and influence its direction.

‘Heart of Hastings have done a marvellous job in involving the community in the Trinity Triangle. They have been visible, creative, and active; finding innovative ways to engage the community. They have worked closely with local community groups and made grants to them to reach hard to reach groups. They have involved a broad range of artists in their work and programme, and they have worked across and with the business community, education and other key stakeholders. There is an energy and vibrancy to how they work and events like Wonder Golf, and their Christmas Advent windows will live long in the memory of residents. Isolation Station Hastings helped develop a Community HUB for Hastings during the pandemic and ensured that key information and services remained accessible. At a time when many were socially isolated ISH kept people connected and provided exciting programming and activities”

**Steve Manwaring – Director Hastings Voluntary Action, Chair – Hastings Covid 19 Response Group, Director East Sussex College, and Hastings & St Leonards Academy Trust**

“This year we laid the foundations for our programme. Despite Covid, we got the word out about opportunities for people to get involved and they are making the local connections that are shaping and delivering activities. We’ve used the time to design systems that work well and to investigate what changes will have the impact to help people transform their high street. We can do more to make decision-making more inclusive. We can use our website to get greater transparency and feedback on what we’re doing. We are looking forward to completing our first build projects and alongside these visible signs of progress, our cultural programme and heritage training opportunities will get into full swing. We’re all hopeful in the year ahead the community can come together again and we want to be ready to celebrate what that means for the local businesses and residents of the Trinity Triangle.”

**James Leathers Executive Director, Heart of Hastings.**