

BASINGSTOKE & DEANE OVER 55's FORUM ANNUAL REPORT 2013

1. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Forum has had another successful year, especially in terms of membership which reached a record figure of 624 by the end of our financial year. This is especially pleasing in these difficult times and, we hope, reflects the excellent value for money that is offered by membership of the Forum. I would like to express my thanks to all the volunteers on the Committee for their hard work, with special thanks to the Secretary, Gerald Merritt, and Vice Chair and Membership Secretary, Marian Wilson and Treasurer, Jane Farrow.

Although the Accounts show a small loss this year, the financial status of the Forum is still very healthy, due to the careful management of costs by the Committee. Not only are we keeping the subscription at £6 for a further year, those members who renew their membership for 2014 before the end of December 2013 will only pay £5 each!

We must express our thanks to Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council for continued support for the Forum during the year. The 8 members of the committee meet every month and we are very grateful to the ASDA for providing us with a room for our meetings, free of charge.

As usual, we held Open Forum meetings every two months during the year and these have continued to be very successful and popular, with an average attendance of over 200 members. Although we were again let down by some speakers, we have still been able to offer a wide variety of guest speakers on topics of interest to the members.

These covered subjects as diverse as the merger of Basingstoke and Winchester Hospital, Rubbish & Recycling, the Story of the WI, Hounds for Heroes, the new Universal Benefits System, Hawk Conservancy, the new Meals on Wheels Service, Cycling in the Town Centre, Stagecoach Buses, Crime & Vandalism, an Olympic Torch runner and many more.

Your committee will continue to seek interesting speakers and suitable topics for the Open Forum meetings in the coming year. We are grateful to those members who have elected to receive their documents by email which does help to keep our costs down.

Thanks to the hard work by our Vice Chair, Marian Wilson, we have been able to send bimonthly Newsletters to all members, with items of interest and information about local and national issues, including a summary of the topics covered at the Open Forum meetings. The full version of the Minutes of the Open Forum meetings is always available on the Forum's own web site at www.bdover55sforum.btck.co.uk. The web site also contains much more information on the activities of the Forum, trips etc. Members without access to the Internet can request copies of the Minutes from our secretary, Gerald Merritt.

The Forum continues to raise matters of concern to its members and has had some successes in bringing the issue of cycling in pedestrian areas to the attention of the police and the danger caused by lorries parking in Kingsclere Road. We continue to hold regular meetings with our champion on the Borough Council, Cllr Osselton, and covered a number of issues, including the Newman Court development, gypsy encampments, the £1 charge by the Anvil and Haymarket and the changes/reduction in the bus service.

The Carnival Hall has proved to be a convenient and popular venue for the Open Forum meetings and we have very good relations with the management. Your Committee is aware that, should the number of members wishing to attend the Open Forum meetings increase significantly, the Carnival Hall would not provide sufficient accommodation. Whilst we continue to review other venues, none has offered the right amount of space, in a convenient location at a reasonable price.

The portable hearing loop previously used at the Carnival Hall has been out of action for some time and, rather than replace it, it was decided to fund the installation of a permanent Hearing Loop in the Hall, which was actually cheaper than the portable loop. This was carried out and will provide a benefit to the community in general as well as our members. The management of the Hall are funding a plaque stating that the installation was funded by the Forum.

The Forum continues to be recognised as a voice in the community for older people and is represented on a number of local voluntary groups and committees, such as the Voluntary Sector Forum, the Older Persons Partnership Board, the Transport Forum and the Disability Forum. Gerald continued to represent the interests of the over 55s as a trustee on the Foundation, following the merger of Basingstoke, Winchester and Andover Hospitals, and has addressed a number of issues on behalf of members.

We are still a key member of the HAOPF which has started to address issues at a higher level and, in some cases, works with Age Concern in relation to matters affecting older people. Although, the All Parties Parliamentary Group for Older People has been set up, there have been some setbacks so it has yet to address major issues.

On the social side, our secretary arranged some fifteen coach trips during the year, many with two or more coaches, such was the demand. All proved very popular, with highlights being the visits to Highclere Castle, Wimbeldon Tennis Courts, Bath Narrow Boats, the National Arboretum and the Hawk Conservancy.

As a "thank you" to members for supporting these trips, a special **free** trip, for those members who booked and paid for three or more trips in 2013, has been organised and will take place in the Spring of 2014.

The Forum has continued to support the Basingstoke Lions, and members are offered a discount on tickets for their concerts. We have also maintained close links with Age Concern and have not only attended their Information Days but also promoted and helped at their annual tea dance.

This year, the committee decided on a different approach to the Annual Variety Show, in recognition of the International Day for Older People. Rather than gathering separate acts together, we welcomed the Olde Tyme Professional Theatre Company from the New Forest with their production "The Swinging Sixties Show" which was held, this year at Aldworth College. We were treated to an afternoon of music and comedy and the feedback has been so positive that we hope to welcome them back next year, with a different show. We appreciated the support of Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council and Aldworth College with the event.

The free New Age Kurling sessions at the Carnival Hall continued to be well supported and very popular, as a social event and an enjoyable form of exercise. As we borrow the equipment from the Stroke Association, the Committee continues to make periodic donations to that body, for which they are very appreciative.

We have, this year, added a further activity for our members by offering "Core Fitness" sessions at the Carnival Hall, at subsidised rates. These have proved popular and we hope to resume the sessions in the new year.

The Carnival Chorus has continued to be successful with some 50 members, including five men! We have retained the services of Jamie Allen who has continued to help the choir to develop and grow. The choir has performed in residential homes and other locations and have a number of bookings coming up to Christmas.

Visibility of the Forum continues to grow and there have been articles about the activities of the group in various parts of the media. We have also been invited to provide views on a number of issues affecting older people.

2. SECRETARY'S REPORT

There have been some 15 coach trips, in addition to the Thursford Trip and New Year break. These have again proved successful and the trip to Thursford was so popular last year that a similar trip this year was organised and the New Year trip to Torquay was quickly booked up.

The feedback on all the trips continued to be very positive and 2014 will see new venues such as Stourhead House and Gardens and Shaftesbury, Aylesbury and the Grand Union Canal cruise with a cream tea, Houses of Parliament, Sandringham House, Museum and Gardens, Mystery Tour, Highgrove House and Gardens, RAF Cosford, Bletchley Park Heritage Tour and Thriplow Daffodils and Baldock.

As 2014 will see the centenary of the start of World War, the Forum is looking at ways of commemorating the event. One event is a 3 night trip to the War Graves in Belgium and France, with guided tours and entrance to 2 museums. The cost will be £379 which includes DBB at the hotel and any entry costs. We hope to obtain some funding towards events to commemorate the centenary.

We will continue to use Truemans of Aldershot for the trips as they have proved to be very reliable and competitively priced. Also, they were happy to be paid after the trip whereas other companies required payment in advance.

The Carnival Hall has continued to provide a readily accessible and suitably sized venue for the Open Forum meetings and we are appreciative of the support from the management at the Hall.

Once again, we must express our thanks to Basingstoke & Deane for their support and help in printing and distributing information to our members, with a special mention for June Balcombe who provides us with excellent support.

We also greatly appreciated the generosity of a number of local organisations who donated some great prizes for the raffle at the Variety Show. This was a great help in raising a significant amount which helped towards the cost of the event. We were especially appreciative to Tesco who provided their community support person to help at the Show.

We have now established regular communications with our "twin" European Forum in Euskirchen and continue to exchange information. We have, so far, been unable to arrange any exchange visits.

3. TREASURER'S REPORT

The Summary of Accounts is attached to this report and will be displayed on screen at the AGM in December. The Accounts are being independently audited and we hope to have formal approval in time for the AGM. Approval from members will be sought at the AGM.

The Accounts up to our financial year end (31 October 2013) demonstrate that your Committee has contained costs and the Forum is in a very healthy financial position. In the current climate, this will enable the Forum to continue to operate, even if we are unable to raise funds from grants in the coming year. We are also pleased to say that not only are we able to keep the membership subscription at £6 for yet another year, we are offering a reduced subscription of £5 to those members who renew before the end of December 2013.

The Variety Show was very well attended this year and, although we kept the price of tickets to £5 and spent far more on the performers, we still made a small profit, as we provided our own food and we are grateful to all the volunteers who helped on the day.

As agreed at the last AGM, any surplus from the Trips has been allocated to the Choir and a charge of £3, discounted to £2 for members, is now applied to the tuition sessions. A donation of at least £25 is requested for performances by the Choir and these measures have put the Carnival Chorus on a much sounder financial footing.