

BASINGSTOKE & DEANE OVER 55's FORUM ANNUAL REPORT 2014

1. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

2014 has been a busy year for the Forum as we have organised special activities to commemorate the centenary of the start of the First World War, in addition to our regular events. Our membership continued to grow, to the extent that we had to place a "cap" on membership when it reached the figure of 660. We have set up a waiting list and, as the number of members drops (for example at renewal time), then places will be offered to those named on the list. This has been necessary as we are limited to numbers at the Carnival Hall and, despite our searches, there is no other venue in Basingstoke that can cater for larger numbers and offer the same facilities as the Hall.

The additional activities included sending a packet of poppy seeds to our members, holding a commemorative music and poetry afternoon in the Carnival Hall and a trip to the WW1 Battlefields in France and Belgium, with a DVD of the event included in an Open Forum meeting.

I would like to express my thanks not only to all the volunteers on the Committee but also to their partners and other members for their hard work at meetings and other events. Special thanks are due to the Secretary, Gerald Merritt, and Vice Chair and Membership Secretary, Marian Wilson and Treasurer, Jane Farrow.

The Forum was one of only 8 organisations from Hampshire nominated for Queen's Award for Voluntary Service and although we did not win, our Secretary, Gerald, did receive an award for local volunteers from the Mayor of Basingstoke & Deane. The Chairman and Secretary were honoured to represent the Forum at a Hampshire County Service at Winchester Cathedral, to commemorate the start of WW1.

Although the Accounts show a very small loss this year, the financial status of the Forum is still very healthy, due to the careful management of costs by the Committee. This year, we provided additional benefits, with a free coach trip to those members who travelled on at least 3 trips in 2013, free entry to the WW1 music and poetry afternoon, free New Age Kurling and we subsidised the single person supplement on the WW1 Battlefields trip. In addition, we continued to subsidise the weekly Core Fitness sessions.

Last year, we also offered a reduced membership renewal fee of £5 to those members who renewed their 2014 membership for 2014 before the end of December 2013. In addition to keeping the membership subscription at £6 for a further year, we are again offering the reduced fee of **£5** to those who renew by 31st December 2014.

Thanks are expressed 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 ASDA for providing us with a room for our committee 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 220 members. Although the speakers we might prefer were not always available, 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 Breeze Local Radio, Stagecoach Bus Services, Poisons and Forensics, the Real Pirates of the Caribbean, the Sports Centre, Clinical Commissioning, the Sultanate of Oban, the Bevin Boys, the Hampshire Fire Service 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. We would like to use this facility to contact more of our members so, if you do not

currently receive documents by email and are happy for us to send you emails, please provide your name and email address on the tear-off slip at the end of this report and pass it to a committee member.

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, such as the negotiations to stop the dangerous parking by lorries in Kingsclere Road, reinstatement of a bus service from the bottom to the top of town and restoration of some of the seating in Festival Place. We have taken up some other issues such as notification of breast screening for over 70s, siting of the new recycling banks, changes to the bus services and reductions to the mobile library service.

We continue to hold regular meetings with our champion on the Borough Council, Cllr Osselton, and covered a number of issues, including the changes to the bus services, Oakridge Nursing Home and the locations of the new hospital and the new cemetery. Cathy will be holding a surgery in a room at each of our Open Forum meetings where local residents can raise any issues in privacy.

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. Following the installation of the hearing loop at the Hall (funded by the Forum), the Basingstoke Gazette published an article with photographs about the installation.

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 and the Transport Forum. Gerald continued to represent the interests of the over 55s as a trustee on the Hampshire Hospitals Foundation Trust and has addressed a number of issues on behalf of members.

We are still a key member of the Hampshire Association of Older Peoples' Forums at which information is exchanged and 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.

On the social side, our secretary arranged some fifteen coach trips during the year, many with two or more coaches, such was the demand. Especially popular were the visits to the Houses of Parliament where 4 separate trips were arranged. The free trips were organised on two separate days, visiting Gloucester. Other highlights were the visits to Bletchley Park, Sandringham and the boat trip on the Grand Union Canal. The New Year trip this year will be to Porthcawl.

This year, Age Concern has been undergoing significant changes so the Forum Committee carried out most of the work to support the mid year Tea Dance at Aldworth School and has arranged a Christmas Tea Dance at The Carnival Hall in December.

Following the successful event in 2013, the committee took the same approach to the Annual Variety Show, in recognition of the International Day for Older People. Rather than gathering separate acts together, we welcomed back the Lyrics & Laughter Theatre Company (previously the Olde Tyme Professional Company), from the New Forest, with a new production "Lyrics & Laughter", which was again held at Aldworth School. This was a sell-out (almost 400 tickets sold) and we have had very positive feedback about the event. We appreciated the support of Basingstoke & Deane

Borough Council and Aldworth College for the event and all those organisations who sold tickets or donated prizes for the raffle.

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.

Whilst the new event, "Core Fitness" sessions at the Carnival Hall, was well attended to start with, numbers have dropped significantly and we may have to consider if we can continue to offer subsidised rates.

The Carnival Chorus has continued to be successful with some 50 members, including five men. Unfortunately, we have lost the services of Jamie Allen but his place was successfully filled by Keith who has continued to help the choir to develop and grow. The choir has performed in residential homes and other locations and has 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 WW1 Battlefields Trip and New Year break. The 2013/14 New Year trip to Torquay was very popular and, this year's trip to Porthcawl is fully booked. We will be travelling to Birmingham for the Christmas Market this year on Monday 24th November.

The feedback on all the trips continued to be very positive and 2015 will see new venues such as Dover Castle (with underground hospital / tunnels), Ideal Home Exhibition, Guide Dog Training Centre in the Warwick area and Hatton Country World, Mayflower Theatre Shows and Christmas Carols at the Royal Albert Hall and many more.

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.

However, we have suffered from a number of late cancellations this year which has resulted in several trips running at a loss as we were unable to resell the seats. This has been subsidised from the membership fees but this was not felt to be fair on those members who do not travel on the trips. Therefore, for the 2015 trips, we will, I am afraid, have to ask for payment at the time of booking. Refunds will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

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 ASDA who provided their community support person to help at the Show.

3. TREASURER'S REPORT

The Draft 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 2014) demonstrate that your Committee has contained costs and the Forum is in a very healthy financial position. This will enable the Forum to continue to operate and offer benefits to its members for the foreseeable future.

We are also pleased to say that not only are we able to keep the membership subscription at £6 for yet another year but we are, once again, offering a reduced subscription of £5 to those members who renew before the end of December 2014.

This year's Variety Show was even better attended than last year and although we spent more on the food and the performers, we still made a small profit. We are especially grateful to all the volunteers who helped on the day and to those organisations who provided such excellent prizes for the raffle, significantly helping towards the costs.

It is unfortunate that a small number of members have forced us to review the trip booking arrangements but it is hoped that the proposed changes will overcome the problem of late cancellations, with the consequent cost to the Forum.

As previously agreed by members, the surplus from the Trips was allocated to the Choir and a donation of at least £25 is requested for performances by the Choir. The charge of £2 per tuition session and other measures have put the Carnival Chorus on a much sounder financial footing and it is not proposed to make any transfer of funds from the main Forum Accounts this year.

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I am happy to receive information from the B&D Over 55s Forum by Email.

Name:.....

Membership Number.....

Email Address.....