

Notes from the Community Forum on 18.01

Thank you for attending the Community Forum at Court Bushes Community Hub. It was great to see so many local groups and organisations come together and have an opportunity to network. Please find below some of the information that was discussed at the Community Forum.

MSVA (Mid Sussex Voluntary Action)

Nicola spoke about what MSVA (soon to be re-named “Community People”) can do for their members including: helping with funding, reading and advising on grant applications, advice on governance, trustees and structures and also helping to set up new groups. The organisation also aims to connect groups with similar or overlapping aims. Membership of MSVA is free and you find out more about their services and sign up via their website: [MSVA | Mid Sussex Voluntary Action](#). Membership also comes with a regular newsletter.

MSVA will be running three of their own networking events this year and the focus will be on fundraising. A new Eco Forum is running on 28th February in Burgess Hill and all groups (particularly environmental groups) are encouraged to attend. Please contact MSVA for more information.

MSVA are also running 3 volunteer fairs over the next 3 weeks:

Haywards Heath Baptist Church – Saturday 20th January 11am-1pm, The Crown Pub, **East Grinstead** on 27th January 10am-12pm and Cyprus Hall in **Burgess Hill** on Friday 2nd February 1pm – 3pm. Again, information on all their events can be found on their website, via their newsletter or you can call them between 10am and 3pm Monday to Friday on 01444 258102.

Other focuses this year include Equality and Diversity – looking at own board first and then passing this information down, plus a new volunteer coordinator, looking at youth volunteering and minority groups.

Befriended:

Gail spoke about the vision of Befriended, namely “to end isolation and loneliness of older people living in Mid-Sussex”. Befriended started in 2017 with face-to-face befriending. During the pandemic, as the face-to-face work had to stop, they did acts of kindness – cream teas in a box/Christmas hamper and so on. In 2021 Gail took up the role of CEO, and Befriended have gone from 21 clients to over 700 clients and growing steadily. In 2021 they offered just 1 service and now offer 10, including exercise classes, tea parties, the Befriended choir, bereavement courses and café, end of life support and bus trips to shows.

The services are all designed to target the main reasons for isolation, namely: bereavement, health changes, moving location (including into care homes or assisted living) and change of occupation (including retirement).

Gail also outlined the challenges faced by their organisation including fundraising, and managing rapid growth in the face of dropping volunteer numbers.

Aims for 2024 include starting up a regular tea party in Hurst and to employ a no. 2!

More information, including all their events, can be found on their website: [Home - Befriended](#)

Community Transport Sussex:

Lee spoke about CT Sussex, previously known as Bluebird, which now has five depots across the county. It is their aim to help and support the community of Mid Sussex, East Grinstead and Henfield by providing accessible transport to all those who, because of disability, age or disadvantage, have problems accessing public transport. Membership is free and wheelchair accessible vehicles are available.

CT Sussex is keen on collaborating with other volunteer groups with transport for events, other suggestions of the help and support they could provide to our villages included:

Regular shopping bus on a weekly basis CT Sussex could provide a subsidised regular bus service to take people who might otherwise not be able to get out to a shopping centre or supermarket. To make this service affordable at point of access, however, it would likely require grant funding. Fares received from passengers would offset the cost of the trips, so clearly the busier a service is the more cost effective it would be, but for every £7 fare there is a further £18 - £21 "top-up" to cover the costs. It was suggested that these sorts of trips should be geared towards local traders and high streets rather than supermarkets.

Volunteer car drivers / car club CT Sussex have been involved in setting up such a scheme elsewhere so have experience of the training and volunteer management this requires. The issue here, as with many services, is recruiting volunteers. In the recent transport survey, 28 people said they would be interested in volunteering, but of those only 17 left any contact information.

More information about services offered by CT Sussex, and how to contact them, can be found on their website [Services - Community Transport Sussex \(ctsussex.org.uk\)](http://ctsussex.org.uk)

Age UK West Sussex Brighton & Hove:

Sara spoke about Mid Sussex Age UK, part of West Sussex and Brighton & Hove Age UK. They generate all their own income and fundraise for everything they do, facing the same challenges in terms of reduced funding and volunteer numbers as being experienced by other organisations. Sara spoke about what they offer currently in Mid Sussex. Their aim, via their "Community Agents" is to support and signpost people over 65 to organisations, activities, and services to reduce social isolation and loneliness. Sara talked about her development work, with plans to bring a new group to Hurstpierpoint this year.

They manage two buildings locally:

Lamb House is an activity centre in Haywards Heath, activities include choir, exercise classes, knit and natter and a café open for coffee and cakes or lunch Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. They are starting a new afternoon group in February with speakers of interest coming in to give talks. More information, including a time table of activities, can be found here: [Age UK West Sussex, Brighton and Hove Mid Sussex](http://ageuk.org.uk)

Kings Weald Community Centre in Burgess Hill which has activities for all ages. More information, including a timetable, can be found here: [Kings Weald Community Centre \(ageuk.org.uk\)](http://ageuk.org.uk)

The Co-Op

Donna (Member Pioneer for Sheddingdean, Kings Weald and Hurstpierpoint Co-Op branches) spoke about the community funding offered by the Co-Op. The Local Community Fund the Co-Op selects two causes in each community to be part of the fund for 12 months. One of this year's recipients is The Melting Pot Café, who kindly supplied teas and coffees for the event today. You can find out more about funding here: [Co-op \(coop.co.uk\)](https://coop.co.uk). Previous years have included Age UK, Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity and The Royal Sussex Regiment.

Other local groups who have received support from the local Co-Op include, Hurstpierpoint Girls Brigade, The Monday Group and Weald Nursery to name but a few. Smaller projects funded recently include free fruit for children attending the MSDC play days.

Donna also highlighted that groups can sign up for advertising via the Co-Op website. This has been found to give peace of mind to volunteers and clients alike when the service being offered is advertised by a trusted brand such as the Co-Op.

Finally Donna spoke about the Co-Op Wellbeing index website [Home | Wellbeing Index \(coop.co.uk\)](https://coop.co.uk) which gives an insight into what's important to people in a local community, it is also a source of statistics useful to groups applying for grants.

Woodland Flora & Fauna

The group was formed when MSDC advised the area was under development threat and asked for a biodiversity assessment, which turned into a much longer project than anticipated. They can work with landowners to increase the eco value of land which may reduce the risk of development. This work is wide ranging, examples include restoring woodland ponds and developing conservation areas, including for bats and barn owls.

Their biggest concern is that the Low Weald is viewed as an 'easy target' for development because it sits between other designated Areas of Natural Beauty. The areas in the District Plan (South of BH and Sayers Common) which are earmarked for development will be highly environmentally damaging.

The group also advised they were struggling with volunteer numbers. Nicola from MSVA advised she can likely help them to find volunteers. She also suggested they Link in with an organisation called "Weald to Waves" about their own similar projects.

Building Hope:

Naomi spoke about the services on offer to local parents and carers. Their aim is resourcing local people to connect and support families in their community. They run parenting workshops, drop-in sessions and support groups for mums and dads in a supportive, welcoming atmosphere, including here at Court Bushes on Thursday mornings in term time. More about what they offer can be found on their website: [Building Hope | Supporting and encouraging families](https://buildinghope.org.uk)

Sussex Vale Rotary Club:

David Hastings spoke briefly about their club currently made up of 20 members who are volunteers with varying talents. Objectives are to support their area, both directly and by offering support for other local groups and projects. Recent projects include Christmas Hampers via local schools, delivering 39 this year, up from 6 the first year and the "Youth Speaks" debating programme including children from Downlands School. The Sussex Vale Rotary are also funders so were looking

forward to discussing some of the projects mentioned today including transport and the Hurst Festival. More information is available on their website [Rotary Club of The Sussex Vale - welcome. \(rotary-ribi.org\)](http://rotary-ribi.org)

MSOPC

Running since 2004, they set up to deal with problems older people found particularly where they “fell through the net” of other support agencies. IT issues are one of the major issues faced by older people. MSOPC set up a tech support drop in at The Spire in Burgess Hill, which runs from 10am – 1pm Thursday mornings. Since then, further tech support groups were set up via Ardingly and Hurst Colleges, who have now taken on ownership of these groups, where the Sixth Form students help provide the support. MSOPC can also advertise other groups’ events in their newsletter, so would be able to advertise Hurst Festival events / cinema listings and so on. More information is available via their website: [Home Page - Mid Sussex Older Peoples Council \(msopc.org.uk\)](http://msopc.org.uk)

Hurst Festival

It was discussed how important The Arts are for local communities, bringing together volunteers, performers, and audiences alike. Hurst is extremely fortunate in the variety it has on offer including Hurst Festival, Heber Opera Hurst Players, and Hurst Folk. It was suggested that some sort of “Arts Forum” in a similar format to this forum to bring together Arts Groups as there is a wealth of experience (and volunteers!) that could be shared between the groups.