



# BATwords

Please sign the petition

Keep our arts alive and thriving in the Borough of Bexley.

SAVE OUR GALLERY!

## **Newsletter No.33 November 2018**

**This edition is to update you on what is happening with Hall Place by copying some letters and an article written by Sheila Ottley who is starting a petition against the proposals.**

You can make your comments online at News Shopper and the Bexley Times.

**The article by Sheila Ottley email:sheilaottley@btinternet.com**

### **The Arts is under siege in Bexley and we should all take note**

The art scene is dying a slow death in the area led by The Libraries, Heritage and Archives department at the London Borough of Bexley.

Its most recent ineptitude lands now at the doorsteps of Hall Place.

Its short sighted proposal to morph the incredible Stables Gallery space at Hall Place into a concoction of retail shop and corridor exit, leaving local artists with the indignity of hiding behind cashiers and carrier baskets to hang their paintings is a sham. It should be halted immediately. Their insincerity that the forced changes will lead to increased footfall for the gallery is in fact footloose and fancy free.

It fails to address that the reduction to the exhibition space is an attack on a local community gallery, loved by local artists and residents alike. A space where visitors come together from across London and share a love for the Borough and its arts scene. A trump-card in an era of monotone shop fronts and lost green spaces. We badly need this gallery in all its glory.

What has happened to our Borough that they no longer support the Arts? We should recoil that the area's libraries no longer allow art exhibitions and local artists have to go to neighbouring boroughs to exhibit their work.

The Libraries, Heritage and Archives department has responsibilities to uphold in Bexley Borough and the department would turn in its grave if only it remembered its name and role.

There was a time when the Arts in Bexley was up there with the best. I should remind you that we have a long, distinct history when it comes to creative influence.

Luminaries Colin Gill (Bexleyheath), Ernest Greenwood (Welling), Ian Davenport (Sidcup), Quentin Blake (Sidcup) and William Morris (Bexleyheath) all cut their cloth in the area. With Morris's Red House in Bexleyheath a stark reminder of the creativity that runs through the veins of the Borough.

These movers and shakers made people far and wide stand up and take note of Bexley Borough. They are all sitting down now.

We can but hope that the makers of this sad affront on the Hall Place artist gallery will listen to concerns from the local community and change course before it's too late. We can but hope.

**Sheila Ottley, local artist**

**If you also want to state your thoughts on this matter to the Bexley Borough**

Please send your comments to:-

Email: [judith.mitlin@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:judith.mitlin@bexley.gov.uk)

Brenda Hamblin's reply to Judith Mitlin's original (circulated in No 32).

Dear Ms Mitlin  
Re Stables Gallery and Bexley Arts Trust

Since receiving your letter, I have been reeling from the shock. After countless years of having rooms in the Main House for our art and sculpture exhibitions, not accessible if there was a wedding so most weekends, we finally have a custom designed gallery. Now, only a few years later, it is to be ruined if your plans go ahead. It is the only gallery of a reasonable size for good exhibitions of a high standard in the borough or wider locality.

Since the demise of the Arts Council of Bexley, because of no further grant from Bexley, a few of us enthusiasts undertook to keep up the work voluntarily under the name of Bexley Arts Trust. By organising two Open exhibitions a year we enable many artists to show their work as well as giving much pleasure to our visitors. We have an amazing variety of media in both 2D and 3D artworks. In your plans, sculpture could not be safely displayed and it is likely that many artists will be reluctant to submit work which will be hanging in a shop with souvenirs, etc. I think ours are the only Open exhibitions which are selected from all submissions, unlike most other exhibitions which are limited to members of one club and not selected by a panel of professionals. This does make ours special and valued by artists and viewers.

So many of our members are retired, taking part in art clubs and groups, keeping them involved in community thus maintaining a positive outlook which keeps them healthier. We also arrange free social gatherings through the year.

No doubt you remember or have been told that there used to be a shop in that vast reception area. It was closed through lack of sales, I believe. It is a large space with space for a shop again. Presumably, your intention is that parties of school children will exit through the gift shop too in order to spend their pocket money?

It is sad that Bexley Council have their HQ in the enormous Civic Offices with a cathedral like atrium and no area accessible to the community; cannot even put up a poster for the exhibitions.

The fact that you propose this to happen as early as next summer feels like a 'slap in the face' since we've had to book our dates up until 2022. You said we would be refunded but you offer no alternative viable venues, largely because there are none.

Please inform me of any meetings to discuss this issue.

Yours sincerely  
Brenda Hamblin  
Bexley ArtsTrust

Judith Mitlin's reply

Thank you for your letter of 22nd October and I am sorry that you feel you will not be able to work with the new proposals going forward.

The Stables Gallery has been a very popular display space over years and offers great opportunities for all artists/mediums and while we would love to be able to retain the existing uses of our spaces the Council has to make Hall Place & Gardens self-sufficient by 2020-21. We have worked with consultants over the last 6 months, on the overall site, to look at ways to maximise its potential. Moving the shop to the Stables Gallery along with the other measures are part of the proposals that have been worked out to try to achieve our aim.

We have had a lot of positive feedback with regards to the Gallery space as it will see a larger footfall, but I agree that this will not suit all groups and I believe unfortunately this may be the case for your group.

We are not at this stage able to define the space that will be available as this is all to be agreed once we have chosen the shop fittings. At the moment our brief is to keep the back wall free for display.

As it stands at present we certainly can honour your January / February 2019 exhibition and are also confident that we would be able to honour the July date.

I would be happy to meet up with you and will ask to see if there are any other opportunities within the borough that would be able to accommodate your exhibitions, but at this time I cannot offer any guarantees.

Please let me know if you would like to meet and I will arrange a convenient date.

Yours Sincerely,  
Judith Mitlin  
Head of Libraries, Heritage and Archives

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A meeting is being arranged in early December with a few committee members.

Meanwhile, back to what is happening:

Final submission day for the Winter Open Exhibition at the Stables Gallery is Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> December. Email [johndavey@msn.cm](mailto: johndavey@msn.cm) for jpegs, cheques and forms. John Davey at 5 Pinewood Rd, Abbey Wood, SE2 0RY if posting.

We need to make this another really superb event.

In the meantime, very best wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy & Creative 2019