

## A Bright New Chapter for The Bank Arts Centre

July 2024

For the past 11 years, Eyes Open CIC has run the Bank Arts Centre as a non-for-profit community hub making the arts and digital accessible and inclusive to all. Based in a charming grade-II listed ex-Midlands Bank building, this volunteer-led creative centre offers a vibrant mix of exhibitions, live music, theatre, comedy, arts and digital workshops, all designed to engage and inspire. At the heart of their operations is a family and dog-friendly café, providing a welcoming space for community members to gather, share, and create. The Bank is dedicated to fostering positive and lasting change through creativity and learning.



## A New Leadership Team with a Bold Vision

After weathering some challenging years, The Bank is now starting an exciting new chapter, infused with fresh leadership, ambitious plans, and an unwavering commitment to revitalising the community hub. In March 2024, The Bank's Chair of Directors, Peter Brooke, retired from the board after seven years of service. Stepping into the helm are voluntary directors Jon Betts, Abbie Schug, and Liam Hayes, whose significant contributions and fresh perspectives are already driving the Centre forward.

## THE BANK ARTS CENTRE

In Spring 2022, Jon Betts joined the team and established The Vault Digital Hub, an innovative project providing subsidised digital training and learning opportunities for young people aged 8-16. Collaborating with industry-standard tutors, The Vault has hosted multiple free school trips for Hartismere School and local primary schools, and offered hundreds of highly subsidised workshop places to local children. Jon was later appointed General Manager, overseeing the daily operations of the Centre and transforming all aspects of its functions.

In Summer 2022, local artist Abbie Schug joined to lead the re-development of the Centre's creative direction. A passionate advocate for the arts, Abbie has revitalised the exhibitions programme, ensuring The Bank remains a dynamic platform for local artists. She has curated a vibrant programme supporting regional artists and re-launched The Bank's annual Young Artist Award to recognise and nurture exceptional young creatives.

Liam Hayes, a musician and tutor joined the Board of Directors in December 2023. Liam is set to expand the Centre's music programme, focusing on supporting local and emerging musicians, providing uplifting experiences for the community, and attracting new audiences to The Bank.

Further exciting changes came in 2023 with Sean Sibthorpe joining the team as Volunteer Chef. Sean came to The Bank as a customer after moving to the area, and with a wealth of experience in the catering industry has now taken on role as Catering Manager. Sean works tirelessly to diversify the café's offerings, as of July 2024 serving an exciting new hot lunch menu 4 days per week. Advocating supporting small businesses through using locally sourced ingredients and providing high quality, healthy meals at an affordable price.

The new leadership team have laid out ambitious plans for the coming years, focusing on substantial improvements to the Centre's facilities and launching innovative programmes that cater to the diverse interests of our community. The current focus is significant phased re-development of the building to upgrade and expand its existing facilities. This includes an expanded art gallery, updated kitchen and toilet facilities, improved lighting in the main hall, and a new creative workshop space. These upgrades are crucial to providing the community access to high-quality facilities and enriching experiences.

### **Overcoming Challenges with Community Support**

However, the path to progress is not without its challenges. While the Centre is on route to secure funding for these essential works, it is currently at an impasse due to the significant architectural costs required to proceed with full planning applications. This hurdle has temporarily stalled the redevelopment efforts.

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Every event ticket, cup of coffee, workshop booking, or art sale contributes directly to the running costs of The Bank, however the centre is still incredibly is reliant on grant funding to cover core costs and subsidise activities for users. Small gestures such as booking tickets to their events well in advance is life saving and allows to confidently provide activities and entertainment to our community.

The Bank Arts Centre thrives because of the dedication and passion of a small team of 12 volunteers who share a love for the arts and a commitment to our rural community. However, to maintain current offerings and work towards expanding services in the future, they are in urgent need of additional financial and volunteer support.

Particular volunteer roles include:

- Daytime café
- Fundraising
- Marketing
- Finance
- Activities planning
- Handyman for Maintenance jobs

If you feel you have any time to spare and would like to get involved, please do get in touch.

The Bank Arts Centre is more than just a venue; it is a community cornerstone where creativity, learning, and collaboration flourish. As they navigate this exciting new chapter, they invite you to join them in making a lasting impact. Whether through volunteering, attending events, or simply enjoying a coffee at the café, every bit of involvement helps keep this cultural hub thriving. With the collective effort of volunteers and the backing of our community, The Bank is poised to continue its mission of enriching lives through the arts and learning for years to come.

[www.thebankeye.org](http://www.thebankeye.org)

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2 Castle Street, Eye, IP23 7AN. Wednesday – Saturdays. 10.30am – 3.30pm