Manifesto of Nicolai van der Steen for nomination for Social Secretary[1]

My name is Nicolai van der Steen, 23 years old and I am a first year philosophy student at Hughes Hall. This is my first year in Cambridge, and before I came here, I completed an undergraduate degree in mathematics at the university of Leiden, which is in my home country, the Netherlands. Before studying mathematics, I travelled for a year in France, Italy, Australia and New Zealand. Besides these studies and travelling, I am passionate about various kinds of music, sports, but essentially I think I am passionate about learning in general.

I am often asked why I decided to do a second bachelor, switching from maths to philosophy. Apart from a strong interest in philosophy, a strong reason for me to apply to Cambridge was the hope to find a supportive and interactive college community where one could combine excitement / making fun with ambition, which I felt was entirely missing in my university in the Netherlands. This reason relates directly to my main motivation to run for social secretary: I hope to be able to sustain and enhance such a community.

I will now sketch some ways which I imagine will contribute positively to this goal.

Firstly, I think music is a very important element in sustaining and developing our student community. I know from attending the two open-microphone nights of this academic year that we have very talented musicians at Hughes Hall. However, I think that the talents of some of these musicians would be given full play in our bar, rather than in the Pavilion room. That is because the bar and the Pfeiffer room seem to be the heart of the college student community, and it is here that we are free to do what we want, and to discuss, relax and play together. My first proposal would thus be to have more music nights in the bar / Pfeiffer room, and the first attempt to realise this proposal is the jazz night that will take the 7th of March. These nights are aimed at providing students the opportunity to perform their music, or to enjoy the efforts of others, while at the same making it possible to relax, discuss and catch up with fellow students.

These considerations extend to different events, such as bops; I would make the music a central element of bops. This I would realise either by letting live musicians (preferably students) play, or otherwise by thoughtfully considering what records could best be played on the night of a bop. In either case, participation of the students in these choices I consider to be essential. In particular, I would suggest that we pick a theme of bops that relates to the music to be played, and that consequentially the students who are interested in the aspect of music have a say on the choice of records, or live musicians.

Besides music related ideas, I have some other plans (some of which might not be original), though these are not yet carefully thought-out: I think we could put up a play in the bar; we can organise dinners prepared by students in the bar / Pfeiffer room, perhaps in a certain style of cuisine; we can have movie-nights in the Pfeiffer room, with somebody putting the film in a broader context, or discussion following the movie – this could also be nicely combined with first having a diner; we could have discussion / debating nights about pressing issues such as climate change and our personal attitudes towards them in the Pfeiffer room, followed by drinks; and lastly, Caterina Trentin (third year Psychology student at Hughes Hall) are developing the idea to organise a night where the students of Hughes Hall present their expertise through a form of art.

Let me finish by saying that a community to me only seems to be really a community when its members form plans together. Therefore, I would make it a first priority to try to get people involved in putting up events *they* feel passionate about, and to help them as much as possible to realise these events.

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[1] My nomination is proposed by Nikhil Dutt Sundaraj and seconded by Caterina Trentin.