

WARD REPORT - OLD HASTINGS - APRIL 2011

COUNCILLOR JOHN HODGES

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Much of our time as trustees of Hastings Pier has been given over to a combination of fund raising and "just waiting". Waiting for May 10th to arrive, purdah to be over, and at last being party to the Heritage Lottery Fund's decision on our application for grant funding. Despite the huge sums of money that the HLF accumulate for purposes such as own, its availability is far outstripped by the huge amount of calls placed upon it. We have a good business case, supported by a strong argument and it is this that keeps us supremely hopeful of an outcome that would be welcomed by the whole of Hastings. The fantastic team of fund raisers led by Lesley Davies continue to amaze me by the steady flow of income that they generate. This is still so desperately needed by the Trust, and literally remains as our life blood.

Last week I was interviewed by both TV and radio following the public statement by the Police that they would not be charging anyone with the suspected arson attack on the Pier. Whilst this remains as an emotive subject with most of us, the CPS were unable to put together a case that would result in a successful prosecution being brought against either of the persons that were under suspicion. Whatever moral satisfaction an effective judgement in this case might have delivered, it would not have replaced that icon of Hastings that has been destroyed as a consequence.

Work continues on the problems in Croft Road, the Team has met and a course of action has been agreed. This will involve the creation of a fence and blackthorn barrier behind the ad hoc parking area, and the filling and blinding over of the deep gullies that present a hazard to the public who use this area. Work will get underway on the cutting back of selected undergrowth, and the clearing of branches that reduce the effectiveness of the street lighting in both Croft Road and Love Lane. Should road planings become available ESCC have agreed to further extend the hard standing in the area. Croft Road now features on the agendas of several meetings that deal with neighbourhood crime, including the Safer Hastings Partnership. Once again I would ask all

residents to keep me, and the Police of course, informed of any further incidents.

During the month a further meeting took place of the group that are considering the future of the Old Town Museum. This group has now been extended to include HOTRA, who added to what was a lively debate involving a diversity of opinion on several different routes to achieving the group's, and indeed the Borough Council's objectives. A site meeting was held in Courthouse Street with the Director and his Officers, who are responsible for resolving the enforcement of the pedestrianisation order, in the light of objections received to the proposed barrier. Let me say quite openly that there is no glaringly obvious solution to this problem that will suit all people, including those suffering from any form of disability. Following a lengthy discussion a possible way forward was agreed, and referred back to the Traffic Engineers for investigation and further safety audit.

I proposed a successful amendment to an earlier proposal on the future of the fishing industry in Hastings, during April's meeting of the full council. This follows some six months of correspondence by myself with everyone connected with the problems of quotas and discarding, including Amber Rudd MP, Maria Damanaki the European Commissioner for Fisheries, and all of our own MEPs. My current belief is that some movement is beginning to take place on both issues with the EU admitting to the unacceptable wastage of resources created by the discarding of excess fish taken in the trawl, and the British Government reconsidering a more equitable way of apportioning the national quota between boats of different sizes. The amendment received unanimous support from all sides of the Chamber for this, the most traditional of all our local industries.

Following our successful campaign to retain the Boyne Road play area, I, together with the Chairman of the CVRA, attended the opening of new play area in Watermill Drive in Hollington. This was an excellent answer to what is needed in Boyne Road, introducing a new concept of play that utilises reclaimed wood in the creation of "adventure driven structures" that I am certain will exercise both the child's cognitive abilities as well as their more traditional physical prowess. Our next task is to investigate and pursue the necessary sources of funding to make this much needed

improvement to the play facilities for the youngsters of Clive Vale come to rapid fruition. Following last month's walkabout, the first series of notices have now been served by the "Grotbusters Team" within Old Hastings, I hope that progress on the respective buildings soon becomes apparent. I have attempted to clarify the unsatisfactory introduction of the new Food Standard's Agency rating system for businesses where food preparation is involved. My drive is towards the provision of a wider understanding of what the rating system actually means, as this complete lack of explanation has caused significant distress to several local businesses. A zero or other low rating most definitely indicates a failing in respect of what should be observed by a food hygiene inspector. It could mean the absence of the appropriate certification or books of record, or the need to call back to verify the completion of an agreed action within a fixed time frame, it does not mean that the premises has a kitchen "knee deep in cockroaches and dripping in salmonella". Such premises would be subject to closure under any set of hygiene standards, not a rating. Everyone I spoke to actually welcomed the principles of the new approach, as it should result in yet further improvements in the food industry.

As the ward councillor for Old Hastings I attended a meeting of the Traffic Management Committee to speak in support of several changes to traffic regulations. By a unanimous decision the objections to both the 20mph speed limit throughout the Old Town, and the two way operation at the very top of the High Street, were overturned. I am now hopeful that all of the improvements that I have been campaigning for will become effective in the very near future. One of the major issues during the month has been the problems caused to residents, particularly Dudley Road, by inconsiderate usage of the street by a number of student coach operators during unsocial hours. This problem is by no means strictly parochial it tends to happen in several parts of the Town, and is compounded by the dangerous practice of loading and unloading students into the middle of the road. As part of attempting to develop a code of practice between the Town and HOSAC (the operators organisation) a number of safe locations that can accommodate a left hand drive vehicle are being explored. The initial drop off and departure points at Falaise Road and Sea Road are both ideal as they can accept all manner of vehicles, the problems occur during casual journeys that

are subject to more irregular timings where the need is to deliver students closer to their host families.

One of the more unpalatable episodes of the month involved some racially motivated graffiti being daubed on businesses in the Old Town. Both the Police and the Council are on top of the problem, and I am determined that Hastings' hard won reputation as a truly cosmopolitan society, will never be surrendered to a few mindless bigots and their poisonous daubings. In complete contrast it was great to see so many people from all colours and creeds join together in the "march against the cuts", another demonstration of unity by the people of Hastings in the face of adversity. Case work continues unabated, and I welcome the opportunity to offer what help I can to anyone who has a problem that falls within my gift.

Have a great May Day, and let us all continue the fight to keep this important occasion intact for Hastings, for our visitors on two wheels, and for our very own Jack in the Green.

Kind Regards to all, John Hodges