

## **WARD REPORT - OLD HASTINGS - JUNE 2011**

### **COUNCILLOR JOHN HODGES**

**([cllr.john.hodges@hastings.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.john.hodges@hastings.gov.uk) or 445540)**

Now that the euphoria of a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund has begun to subside, the strategy for releasing the full award of £8.7m is now under development. The significant areas of the bid that need to be addressed were explained to an attentive audience at the AGM of the Hastings Pier and White Rock Trust held on May 9th. In simple terms a company will be set up to manage the trading aspects of the pier charged with the task of providing the necessary funding that will ensure the sustainability of the exercise. A trust will be created that will own the pier, and a further company will be created to have responsibility for the ongoing maintenance, the lack of which was the basic reason for the current demise of the structure. The original HP&WRT will continue in its present role as the aspirations of the group extend beyond the pier, and look to the potential development of other aspects of the White Rock area.

On the Saturday preceding the AGM a consultation day was held at St. Mary in the Castle. This was the first opportunity that the appointed architects had of sharing with the public their plans for the reconstructed pier. A three dimensional model was displayed demonstrating some of the features that will hopefully be incorporated, many of which came out of the original consultation day held on the Prom. Perhaps the most encouraging development of this exercise is the massive public support that we have enjoyed. There is nowhere that this is better exemplified than in the fantastic designs for a new pier that have been developed by the local schools. Yes, young imaginations have run riot, but their outputs in many cases are practical, contributory to the concepts that we seek, and above all representative of the views of a different generation. We continue to take the opportunity to consult on every possible occasion, and during the next month we will be taking the "roadshow" to Westfield, the Trinity Triangle, and ASDAs.

During the next month the first meeting of the local organising committee for the visit of the Olympic Torch takes place, and I should be very pleased to pass on any views on this subject that you might hold. The best news of all this month came with the announcement that Hastings will receive the benefits of High Speed Broadband during next year. Having worked on this project for the last four years, including the research project on potential usage, I am certain that it represents the single greatest additional strength to the case for businesses to come to Hastings. I believe that what must now happen is for a strategy to be developed that will legislate for the most effective method of deployment, one that can return the greatest benefits in the drive to secure Hastings in the Nation's eyes as a place to do business. We must also provide the education necessary for both businesses and citizens alike to understand the technologies that this system can deliver. With conventional methods of access through road and rail leaving much to be desired, we have at last an alternative through technologies like telepresence, telehealth, telecare, teleducation, the list is endless. But in keeping with all ethereal solutions to real time problems, education is essential if only to dispel the myth of "smoke and mirrors".

During this period activity in and around Old Hastings has been pretty hectic. I attended an outdoor gathering of Council Officers and Friends of the Country Park in a tour of the East Hill for the purpose of agreeing the siting of a number of new benches that are being donated. The final positions of these new seats will now provide some superb views of the sea and the Old Town for those who prefer the more sedentary aspects of sightseeing. Several openings and events took place this month that I attended including the new pirate based crazy golf course, the very poignant Anne Frank Exhibition at the College which very clearly brought home the message that the evil forces of genocide that surrounded Anne Frank still very much exist to this day. I also visited the opening of the SOCO Exhibition at the Stade Hall with the fantastic works of art on show, once again producing another shining example of the talent that abounds here in Hastings. I was part of the civic party that were invited to attend the opening of the new Stade Cafe, with its colourful tables and chairs spilling out on to the community space it provides a superb addition to the ever growing range of facilities in this new heart of the Old Town. I have also attended the climate change conference that was

held in the Stade Hall, this was an excellent event that deliberately set out to provoke the deepest thoughts and concerns that were nurtured by the participating audience. Our continual involvement in carbon promoting activities, coupled with our inability and apparent unwillingness to tackle this problem will remain as a threat to the future of mankind until the developed world addresses the root causes of this problem. In keeping with the other threatening "green giant" ecological footprinting, it is not enough to seek solace in the totally ineffective principles of carbon trading, and using the third world's poverty as a means of aggregating the damning statistics of the rest of the world's intemperance, it is positive and nationally led action that is required, not unethical number shuffling. I was also very fortunate in being invited to the opening of Jackson Hall, the new home of Hastings Voluntary Action the organisation that does much in Hastings towards developing and delivering the contribution of the third sector. Jackson Hall provides a superb and readily accessible location for this enthusiastic group, where the requisite people skills abound in their approach to the problems of some of the most vulnerable persons within our society.

But as many of our good people aspire to a brave new world parts of our Old Town are still blighted with the problems of the past. Noise and drunken behaviour in the George Street area continues as a scourge to the peaceful enjoyment of their homes by several residents. Fortunately Hastings is blessed with a number of diligent officers who continue to deal with this unwanted behaviour, and will eventually eradicate the root causes and restore the balance that allows both residents and businesses to co-exist in an area that by its very nature, promotes a high level of social activity. I have met with the Chair of HOTRA and representatives of the Borough Council in an attempt to establish a new location for a recycling centre, that will remove the noise pollution that occurs as a result of the current position adjacent to Hastings Wall. Consultation has also taken place with the same group over the methods used in the handling and removal of domestic waste. I have also been assured that when negotiations commence on a new multi-authority contract for this service, trade waste will also be included with a view if possible, of securing the benefits for the local traders that could come as result of the economies of scale.

It is pleasing to report that the works at the top of Croft Road are well under way with both lines of fencing now in position, and awaiting the appropriate time to plant the blackthorn barrier. Already the new fencing presents an aesthetic improvement to the area and will hopefully perpetuate the message to any potential transgressors, that this particular part of Old Hastings is truly cared for. An open air meeting took place on the Stade to consider a number of traffic related issues that continue to concern not only the local residents, but also the effective usage of the infrastructure that will support the new Jerwood Gallery. A number of measures were proposed and agreed by the group, and I will follow the progress of these until their implementation provides the beneficial effects that the meeting identified. I attended another outdoor gathering adjacent to the crazy golf, where on this occasion we were seeking a potential site for a play area for younger children. Two possible sites were identified, and it is hoped that plans and costs can be put together as a precursor to seeking funding to develop one of the sites. During the course of this meeting the Chair of HOTRA also managed to identify a site that could provide for the erection of an outdoor table tennis facility, another link in the hoped for external fitness trail.

I attended another very positive meeting of the group that is looking at the future of the Old Town Museum. Many of the actions that were proposed at the previous meeting have now been actioned by the curator and her staff, and this has produced a much more open and welcoming aspect to the museum, we await to measure the affect of these changes on footfall. I was accompanied on a further walk around the Old Town by the Head of Amenities once again in pursuit of establishing the need to preserve the ancient townscape, including the many old lamp standards that are suffering from neglect and unsympathetic changes to the aesthetics of their lighting medium.. Jeremy and I also accompanied the Chair of the CVRA to Lewes in support of the petition for a box junction at the Mount Road section of the Sussex Arms Junction. I can report a successful conclusion to this part of the exercise, but the ultimate proof will come if the current level of accidents at this junction is significantly reduced, or eliminated altogether.

As Chairman of the Country Park I can report that we conducted our first review of the introduction of parking charges during the month. It was obvious from the statement that the charges, introduced to maintain the quality of the park and the accompanying service, have bedded in extremely well. There has been no abuse of the system, and the required revenue is being delivered. The Country Park Forum, including the Friends, therefore recommended to the Cabinet that the privilege of a season ticket should now be extended to a wider audience. The Cabinet subsequently agreed to this recommendation, and now offer this privilege to anyone who would prefer to invest in the financial advantages that a season ticket will provide.

Case work still takes up much of my time, but that does not prevent me from assuring you all that I am available to help any of you who may be experiencing a problem that falls within my gift. Not wishing to compete with War and Peace, I will call it a day for this month and extend my kindest regards to you all.

John Hodges