

WARD REPORT - OLD HASTINGS - SEPTEMBER 2011

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Some of the major activity surrounding the pier this month has been directed at the preparation of a requirement specification for the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer. This has brought a tremendous response from high quality applicants throughout the country. This appointment is a precursor to much of the business planning and renovation strategy that must be in place for the release of the major grant funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to take place. The CPO process continues along its tortuous route in parallel with the case to convince the Secretary of State that the proposed restoration method will provide the pier with a sustainable future. All of these activities are interrelated to the point that the principle of the "chicken and egg" conundrum would appear to be the rules of the day. The Trust is hoping to preserve the western solarium by adding the protection of some boarding that will subsequently be decorated in an attractive manner. But even this self funded attempt to add some element of brightness to an otherwise depressing environment has run foul of listed building consent, and other building regulations. Two young people have produced a superb series of posters as an interpretation project of the pier's history, it is intended that they will be on show in the pier shop during Hastings' week.

I continue with my involvement in the high speed broadband project, and early next month I meet with the BT director responsible for the roll out programme. Some good news has already been received with the announcement that the Baldslow exchange, in keeping with the main Hastings exchange will also be fibre enabled. We now await news on the remaining Castleham exchange, which would then give Hastings and St.Leonards full fibre coverage at exchange level. Our main task now is to work with both ESCC and BT to extend that coverage to cabinet level, which will bring both availability and affordability to those who would want to take up the advantages that this new high bandwidth can deliver.

I continue to support the small businesses in Mount Road in their quest to preserve the kerbside that fronts their premises as an area given over to short term parking during the hours of trading. I believe that small businesses should be given every opportunity to enhance the prospects of increasing the footfall at their point of trade, judicious application of parking regulations can most definitely assist in this need. I have once again followed up the continuing absence of the previously agreed box junction designation at the Mount Road intersection with the Sussex Arms junction. The current reason given for its delay is the need for the closure of the junction whilst the work is completed, I shall continue to press for a date.

Following the meeting with the Church Commissioners, regarding the future of All Soul's Church, I have now been informed that the agents acting for the Commissioners have prepared new marketing material. Once these are to hand I will make them available to the resident's association, and keep them informed as to any further progress. There has been a number of incidents of fly tipping reported in the ward, notably at Croft Road and the passage between Dudley Road and Harold Road. Whilst Veolia are to be complimented on the alacrity with which they respond to such incidents, it is still necessary to understand and respond to the root causes of such a continuing problem. Early next month I will attend a meeting with senior representatives from ESCC Highway's Department where problems with resurfacing in Dudley Road and Hill Street, and the continuing usage of aesthetically unacceptable materials during reinstatement works within a conservation area, will form the agenda.

The provision of a young child's play area within the Old Town was pursued through a site visit and a meeting during the month, such that we might develop a suitable specification and costing. The most favourable area that became apparent during the site visit was adjacent to the new MUGA, in the immediate vicinity of the crazy golf facility. Activity on the agreed improvements to the Boyne Road play area together with the provision of a footpath in Lodge Road are also being progressed. I have requested a meeting at director level with Amicus Horizon to press for some signs of physical progress following the initial agreement that was reached over six months ago to address these

shortcomings. A further meeting has taken place in Rocklands Lane with the owners of Rocklands Holiday Park and the residents of the lane, to discuss the effects of the current deterrents that have been installed in response to excessive speeds by some vehicles. It was agreed that some further warning notices would be installed and the results monitored, before recourse would be considered towards more positive traffic calming methods.

In the company of the Lead Member a very useful discussion took place with the Borough Planning Officer over the apparent delays to a number of building projects that have occurred through the application of the conservation process. The Officers have been asked to consider several suggested methods, whereby some of the more straight forward questions of conservation can be handled through a process of delegation to other qualified and competent individuals. A town such as Hastings, with eighteen designated conservation areas and numerous listed buildings, produces both a significant and vital call on the services of our Conservation Officer. If we are to maintain the quality of townscape that is so important to our tourism offer, then there is little doubt that conservation must remain high on our list of prerequisites for such a status to be kept alive.

As a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Team I have been heavily engaged in a review of a methodology called Social Return on Investment, which attempts to assign a value to many of the activities that a council delivers, but is unable to evaluate through the normal channels of cost/benefit analysis. Our task is to understand this technique and to establish if it could provide any benefits in evaluation, to a council committed to improvement in the value of the services that it delivers to its citizens. A second team that I am part of is addressing another continuing problem, where services delivered by a third party eg. utility installations and repairs are not effected in such a way as to provide the minimum of disruption to every day life. Through a process of appraisal and consultation it is hoped that such interruptions can be minimised, their duration foreshortened, and viable alternatives provided in mitigation where closure of a route becomes inevitable. I would be very happy to receive your views on either of these subjects.

As usual within the Old Town traffic movement and parking, or the lack of both, continue to be discussed in a number of forums. HOTRA have convened a meeting to take on board resident's views of suggested changes to the current modus operandi, these will be fed into the joint review to be held with ESCC, following the opening of the Jerwood Gallery. The proposals that came out of the public meeting on Rock a Nore still remain at a consultation stage, and once completed they will be fed back to the same audience as a selection of proposed schemes that have taken cognisance of the views that were expressed. The question that is posed regarding the future ownership of parking management throughout Hastings and St. Leonards will be placed before ESCC Cabinet at their meeting on November 15th. The Director currently responsible for the management of parking has put an excellent case together for its retention by the Borough, based on firsthand knowledge of the operational issues that accompany the administration of a service in a town that was built long before the motor car was invented. I hope that his common sense prevails over the fatuous arguments for a "one fits all" solution, that may hold good in those parts of East Sussex that post date the equivalent townscape of Hastings by some five hundred years !

Undoubtedly the social highlight of the month, if not the year, was the Seafood and Wine festival held for the first time this year on the new Stade Open Space, and inside the Stade Community Hall. Despite some inclement weather on the Saturday spirits were not dampened, and both the crowds and the enjoyment were huge. Once again the Town must record its thanks to Kevin Boorman and his Team for the massive effort that goes into promoting and delivering such a festival. It was a very poignant moment during the festival when the name of Stephen Potter, a popular Council Officer was unveiled on a bench dedicated to his memory as one of the founders of this fantastic event. It should not be forgotten that throughout this month the Coastal Currents event was also running across the Town, yet another success here in the "capital of festivals". Can any other town boast the year long cycle of events and festivals that we in Hastings are so fortunate to celebrate ? I doubt it.....and long may they flourish and prosper.

Casework continues for me as it does for most councillors, please feel free to contact me if I can help you with any problems that you believe fall within my gift.

My Kindest Regards, John Hodges