

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

### **COUNCILLOR JOHN HODGES**

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Undoubtedly the major event in the colourful life of the pier during the past month, has been the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer. Simon Opie who joins us with hugely impressive credentials that include very senior roles in world famous entertainment venues that boast Madam Tussauds and Euro Disney in their number. With the massive experience in the leisure industry that already exists at board level, now supplemented by the inclusion of Simon, this is one area of our renovation and commercial sustainability programme that we can approach with real confidence. Although not much change is physically visible in the nature of the pier, much background activity continues in both the pursuit of the compulsory purchase order and the finalisation of the design. The other areas of fervent activity concern the continual struggle to raise our part of the matched funding, whilst a final and sustainable business case is developed as part of the exercise to secure the release of the funding from the HLF.

During this period I attended the Town Conference, the third in a series over the years organised by the Hastings and St. Leonards Strategic Partnership. The quality of speakers, both local and national, was excellent with the main guest speaker, Professor Steve Fothergill of Sheffield Hallam University, providing a searching insight into the economies of coastal towns. Professor Fothergill's presentation included plans for economic revival at both national and regional level, these emphasised the need to rebalance our economy from consumption to exports, the use of public sector investment to promote jobs and growth within the private sector, and deficit reduction through growth not cuts. Specifically in the case of Hastings he advocated a new emphasis by government on regional economic development, and a local environment that is pro-business, pro-innovation, and pro-development. He also pointed out the growth in UK seaside tourism as an opportunity for our Town, brought about in part by the prohibitively expensive eurozone. The clear message from all speakers was hope, but we can't

stand still, we must seek new partnerships, and look for a new model to continue regeneration.

The "Let's do Business" exhibition took place during this period, and once again attracted in excess of a thousand visitors. We should explore the feasibility of staging this sort of multi business and attractions showcase in other parts of the UK, to let the rest of the country know what Hastings has within its not inconsiderable offer. I attended a director level meeting in Lewes with BT to further push our case for the early introduction of High Speed Broadband into Hastings. Providing some legitimate use of funding questions can be resolved, then both Hastings and Baldslow exchanges will be enabled next year, while the promise is to up rate the Castleham exchange to ADSL 2 by the end of 2011, a significant improvement that will deliver download speeds of up to 20mbps. The one issue that remains unclear is the extent to which the cabinets served by the exchanges will be fibre enabled, there are several reasons that influence this decision from subscriber distance, to just sheer commercial viability.

I attended the latest planning meeting for the Olympic Torch, it was amazing to see the ever increasing desire to participate in this event, not only from the supporters of the various sports but literally from people representing every section of the community. Whilst the route of the torch will see it entering the Town from the direction of Brighton, the main celebration will take place on the new Stade Community Open Space. It is envisaged that there will be a series of other events taking place in other locations along the route, such that as many citizens as possible can become part of this once in a lifetime event. As the evening of July 17th and the early morning of July 18th approaches, the details of this event will emerge and people will be better able to make their own plans to celebrate in Hastings, as one of only two places in Sussex that have been afforded the honour of an overnight location.

During the month I met with the assistant Director of Highways from ESCC, this included a site visit to a number of locations in the Old Town. The discussion included the omission of West Street from the 20mph TRO, and this will now be rectified. Courthouse Street was also visited and a number of other potential solutions to the lack of enforcement were discussed, my own view still strongly favours the

removal of the temptation to use this street as a short cut in the first place. The need for aesthetically sympathetic replacement of any part of the townscape that undergoes repair was also strongly made, and this included the question of street lighting. As I write the first of the street lights in the twittens has been replaced this one being in Woods Passage, which was most definitely causing light pollution. I will continue to fight for the sympathetic treatment of anything that contributes to our tourism offer, or detracts from the "quiet enjoyment" of our citizen's homes. During this visit we also visited Croft Road and once again I made the point most strongly about the dilatory response by ESCC in effecting the changes to the area at the Torfield end that had been agreed in response to a number of unpleasant crimes. Some work has now been completed by ESCC but I intend to push for further improvements that will bring this area up to the expectations of the working group that was set up in response to the initial complaints. Highway related matters featured very highly during the month, and the part they play in the lives of the citizens and traders of the Old Town was strongly expressed at the meeting called by HOTRA to consider further proposals to increase the safety of the pedestrian, particularly in the High street area. Following this lively consultation it would appear that a lot more consultation between trader and resident is needed before a solution that will address both of their needs will be found. It is good that this discussion took place and brought into the open the concerns of everyone who participated, that is a very necessary precursor to finding a way forward.

The long awaited addition of a box junction at the Sussex Arms junction has finally been scheduled to take place over the weekend of November 12th/13th. Although the actual works can be completed fairly rapidly, it does however involve the disconnection of the permanent traffic lights, the erection of temporary ones, and a schedule of diversions to avoid the area where at all possible. The final factor that can influence the works programme is the weather and should this prove to be inclement, then the whole programme will be postponed until early next year. Amicus called a resident's meeting during the month regarding the refurbishment programme for the children's play area at Boyne Road. These proposals received overwhelming support, and Amicus will now lead a fund raising campaign to implement the improvements that

the residents wish to see. The fight continues with Amicus for the provision of a footpath at Lodge Road, but it is hoped that at least some temporary improvements to the road surface will be effected before the winter arrives. Work continues on the development of plans and costings for the proposed new toddler's play area adjacent to the crazy golf site, it is hoped that this new facility can be brought on line in the first half of next year.

The undoubted highlight of this period was the Hastings' Week celebration, quite how the organisers manage to fit so much into just a little over a week is quite amazing. To say that there was something for everyone is an understatement, the range of ceremonies, events, and competitions is probably unequalled in a provincial town. And culminating in what is now frequently described as the best and most engaging torch lit procession in Sussex, really puts Hastings right up there with the places to be when celebrations and festivals are the order of the day. As the ward councillor for Old Hastings I count myself as both honoured and fortunate to represent that part of our Town that does so much to show the rest of the country what is so good in this corner of Sussex. All of this is made possible by the bands of tireless volunteers whose efforts continue to illuminate the name of Hastings everywhere events and festivals are discussed in terms of the quality and enjoyment that they deliver.

Please don't hesitate to contact me should any of your problems fall within my gift as your councillor.

My Kindest Regards, John Hodges