

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

### **COUNCILLOR JOHN HODGES**

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Once again there is very little to report on the physical state of the pier, but behind the scenes the tortuous process of obtaining a CPO grinds on. Fund raising continues to remain high on our agenda as the need to raise matched funding remains a condition for accessing our HLF grant funding. Much discussion and planning continues on the development of the Community Showroom, this is a project that is vital to both the needs of a public point of focus, and to provide the continuity during the reconstruction phase between what the pier was, and what the new offer will be. As always the Trust is very keen for new members to come forward and perhaps join the ranks of volunteers who are so vital to our ongoing success. Another opportunity that will present itself particularly to local businesses, involves the marketing of pier branded products. For those of you who are familiar with the pier shop our range of products is quite comprehensive, and continues to grow.

In one of my other duties as a member of the Hastings and Bexhill Economic Alliance I attended the annual East Sussex Assembly and the board meeting of the East Sussex Strategic Partnership. The agenda comprised a number of issues that remain important to the community, my own group looked at the continuing need for adult education in terms of a change of career or just simply for those people that the existing system had failed. The outputs of all of the groups will be used to inform "Pride of Place", which is the community strategy document for East Sussex. Another of my roles has come about through my appointment to the local advisory board for the St.Leonards Academy. Our first combined meeting took place during this period, where many aspects of these new educational establishments, from the construction plans for both academies through to a lively debate on the purpose of advisory bodies. It is fairly evident that there is a lot of bedding in to take place at both academies, and it is our job to make sure that the correct levels of guidance and advice are there to ensure that a successful transition programme facilitates the very best in educational attainment for future generations.

To say that I was disappointed at the decision taken during this month by the cabinet of ESCC regarding the termination of Hastings' control over on street parking, would be a huge understatement. This community that I represent, relies heavily upon the trade of tourists, holidaymakers, and those who visit our local businesses to avail themselves of both the products of the land, and of the sea. Much of Old Hastings was built around the sixteenth century, with an infrastructure of roads and highways that are consistent with this period, but totally inconsistent with the pursuit of twenty first century business. Parking, or more specifically the lack of it, has long been one of the most emotive subjects in many parts of Hastings. Within Old Hastings itself there are no solutions to this dilemma, only compromises. These compromises have been developed over many years of negotiation between the traders and the residents, and have continually been given the blessing of a sympathetic and understanding Borough Council, who because of their proximity to the source of the problems understand this continual need for flexibility. Many of the businesses are transient, and as such this year's compromises may not provide the optimum solution for next year's offer. This ever changing scenario, put into the context of the most difficult period of macroeconomic stabilisation for a generation, calls for both sympathy and the flexibility that can only be exercised at the lowest level of civil administration. It is this devolution of authority to a neighbourhood level that allows the local council to respond, very often to questions of real time business survival, that an administration some thirty miles to the West could not hope to understand or even reflect in their own, or a franchised policy for parking administration.

Despite continuing assurances at a national level that the stated principles of "Big Society" would devolve power to local neighbourhoods, quite simply because they know what is best for them and their chance of future survival, this completely uninformed decision at county level flies in the face of the guiding principles of localism. Within Old Hastings there cannot be a more apposite example, than the effective and flexible usage of kerbside parking, of where a decision making process must remain at the most local possible level to achieve at least one of the objectives of a "Big Society" philosophy. I most certainly will continue to fight on, with the total support of the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, the networking groups, the Old Town traders, and virtually everyone who has a link to commerce, business, or just common sense itself.

During November I once again visited All Soul's Church in Athelstan Road, this time in the company of the committee of CVRA,

and the Chief Executive of Hastings Trust. The purpose of this visit was to explore the possibilities of using this now redundant, but magnificent grade two star listed building for community based activities. To the layman such a transition would appear to be extremely difficult and costly to effect, but we will look to seek some advice from a creative architect who may better understand the potential of this splendid building. It is particularly pleasing to report that the box junction at the Mount Road/Old London Road intersection has now been installed, and initial responses to its effectiveness are extremely favourable. We will continue to monitor the ongoing situation against the recognised model of success for such traffic measures, and would hope in the future to report a significant reduction in incidents at this busy junction.

Saturday November 19th brought the community of Croft Road, the local Police Officer, the Neighbourhood Regeneration Co-ordinator, and representatives of the Ranger Service all together on a beautiful Autumn day to complete the final phase of the Croft Road anti-crime project. This comprised the planting of blackthorn, holly, and a clearing of undergrowth from behind the newly installed fencing, together with a general divestment of the woods and paths of a variety of extraneous rubbish. This was a terrific combined effort not only from the supporting services, but with no less than a dozen members of the local community also in attendance. As Chair of the Hastings Country Park Committee I attended a lively meeting in what was the old milking parlour, now part of the conversion at the Fairlight Farm. The excellent work of the Management, the Rangers, and particularly the Volunteers all received glowing praise in continuing to maintain this wonderful asset as one of the jewels in the offer that Hastings can make to both its residents and tourists alike. Our longer term objective is for the creation of an improved visitor interpretation centre, one that can truly do justice to one of the finest areas of natural beauty and diverse ecology in the country.

In response to an earlier public meeting on the traffic problems of Rock a Nore Road, two alternative schemes incorporating the views of the local traders were put forward to an interested audience in the Stade Hall. With some further amendments that were proposed on the night, the modified version will now permit the views of the residents and the disability forum to be sought such that a more comprehensive version can be brought back for the approval that will allow the beneficial changes to be implemented. Once again this month Hastings has been the town of festivals. There was any number of events linked to the children in need appeal, Xtrax had an all week long fund and image raising festival, the highlight being the attainment of a new world record

for the "conga" which currently awaits official ratification by Guinness. There was also the Town wide Story Telling Festival, which not only achieved some notable success, but has once again allowed Hastings to pioneer yet another dimension in the field of public entertainment, congratulations to all concerned, and the shared hopes that we see this event appear as a regular in an already busy calendar of attractions.

Another of my commitments as the ward councillor for Old Hastings is attendance at the Coastal Users Group, a lively gathering who's function is to be consulted by, and offer advice to the Charity Committee. The Charity Committee itself replaced the old Foreshore Trust when this responsibility transferred to the Borough. Our role is to advise on improvements and needs, associated with the foreshore, that can be met from the surplus funds that are generated through the exploitation of the assets owned by the Trust. These funds in the new year will provide for the creation of a new play area for toddlers in Old Hastings, and an investigation into possible provision of improvements from the end of Rock a Nore going eastwards. It is also intended to investigate the feasibility of "pay on exit" facilities for the Trusts two main car parks at Pelham and Rock a Nore. Ultimately it is hoped that this could be linked into to an automated system of car parking availability information.

It now remains only for me to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a prosperous (well at least an upturn in macroeconomic stabilisation) for the new year.

John Hodges