

WARD REPORT - OLD HASTINGS - DECEMBER 2011

COUNCILLOR JOHN HODGES

(cllr.john.hodges@hastings.gov.uk or 445540)

In terms of the pier the most significant event of this period has been the serving of the repairs notice by the Council upon Ravenclaw. In the absence of any positive response the CPO process can then move forward. The other significant event has been the decision to close the pier shop in White Rock. Over the past couple of years the shop has proved a fantastic focus for the pier, its members, and our ongoing fundraising activities. In that time we have succeeded in getting the shop and its internal fixtures and fittings listed by English Heritage, this means that we have preserved what was a typical Military Tailors for generations to come. For those of you who have not had the chance to visit these unique premises, you still have an opportunity for the rest of the year to take that journey back in time. Underpinning all of this activity is Simon Opie our new CEO, who continues to grow very successfully into his role of leading the creation of the people's new pier. Our fundraising activity continues unabated with the very successful "adopt a plank" leading the way. Our need for volunteers and members is also vital to our process, as our funders use both the numbers and versatility of these groups to measure our progress.

Just because it's December the season of festivals does not finish in Hastings. This month saw the creation of a fantastic Victorian Winter Wonderland in the High Street and George Street, complete with Punch and Judy, Santa Claus, and just to make it really authentic accompanied by its own made to order snow showers. A combination of the Old Town's traders made this all possible, let's hope that this winter event becomes a regular in the Old Town's list of stunning festivals. During the month I attended the Stade Hall as a spectator to the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs Committee's inquiry into CFP reform. The case for the Hastings Fleet was put very clearly and very strongly by Paul Joy, with a case based upon the inaccuracy of the scientific methods used in establishing the levels of fish stocks. Paul was supported by other fishermen both local, and representing the national organisations, but the message regarding inaccuracies in fish stock assessment was the

same. There is little doubt in the mind of the independent observer that our own fishermen are the finest conservators of the delicate ecological balance that is necessary to support a sustainable fishing industry, quite simply because their own livelihoods depend upon the conservation of stocks, and the preservation of the traditional fishing grounds. It was also made very clear by Paul that the survival of the small boats is very much dependent upon diversification, and the ability to operate within a flexible environment. Although as a spectator I was not permitted to speak, I was however allowed to submit written evidence. This I did with an argument based upon the sustainability of the industry made so precarious by an inequitable quota system, that does little to attract the younger generation into a future that can best be described as indeterminate, unless the long called for changes are very soon rung.

I attended two further meetings regarding the visit of the Olympic Torch during this period. Locally groups are beginning to be formed with special responsibilities, for certain events, stewarding, and generally assisting with the enormous problem of the logistics associated with huge audience that is predicted for Hastings on July 17th. The other meeting was in Canterbury and was attended by Jeremy Hunt the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, Hugh Roberstson MP, and LOCOG'S Bill Morris Master of Ceremonies for the Olympic Games, where Hastings part in the route of the Torch was put into a national context. During his speech Jeremy Hunt also commented upon the significance of the Jerwood Foundation in selecting Hastings as the site of its new gallery. Work on attracting inward investment into Hastings continues on several fronts, and during the month I faced a panel of students from UCH, who made some extremely strong and valid points on the adverse impact of "Hastings' nightlife" on the student population. These findings will be analysed and fed into the mainstream of investigative work, but there is a strong feeling amongst the students that Hastings as yet, has not caught up with the fact that it is now a university town.

I have also now met with the newly appointed Highway's Steward for Hastings, who accompanied me on a tour of the Old Town so that the special needs of a preserved townscape can be more fully understood when repairs and reinstatements are being undertaken. I was able to

appraise her first hand of one or two old sores that will hopefully now see an early resolution. I am very pleased to report that the long running nuisance of the bottle bank that was located at the bottom of High Street, has now been relocated across the road by the boating lake, and out of ear shot of the residents of Hastings Wall. The long expected water main replacement in Mount Road, which was delayed such that Christmas trade was not jeopardised, will now commence on Jan 3rd and hopefully be complete by the end of February with the minimum of disruption to all who live and trade in the area. There will also be water main replacements during the same period in Alfred Road and Moscow Road. The newly installed box junction at the Sussex Arms junction appears to be working well, with no reported incidents as yet.

I am informed that the long awaited official opening of the Jerwood Gallery will take place on Saturday March 17th, when hopefully this huge lump of cultural capital will start to make a positive impact and create new revenue streams so necessary for the sustainability of trading throughout both Hastings and St. Leonards. By far the most important news for Hastings' future as a town with the capability to attract inward investment, came with the news that from early next year work will commence on the roll out of High Speed Broadband from both the Hastings and Baldslow exchanges. With Hastings' well known problems in being served by ineffective real time communications, then HS Broadband comes as an even greater boon to those who need to communicate with a market place that is remote from the immediate locality. The introduction of HS Broadband will hopefully come accompanied by a programme of training and education that will make people aware of exactly what this new technology can deliver in terms of business enhancement, telecare, education, and numerous other applications many of which are still in development.

A new group which I have been asked to chair, consisting of both traders and residents, is to be set up to explore suggestions on the common ground regarding both pedestrian safety, and enhanced trading opportunities that came out of the public meeting held in November. I would of course welcome any inputs that you wish to put forward for consideration. Our objective is to develop a community wide consensus that can be fed into the promised traffic assessment of the Old Town that

will be undertaken by ESCC, following the opening of the Jerwood Gallery.

Wishing you all the very best for 2012, John Hodges