

WARD REPORT - OLD HASTINGS - APRIL 2012

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The battle to save the pier continues with much of our effort concentrated on the final bid to the Heritage Lottery for our major grant. This, together with our plans for restoration and development, must be submitted by June. Included within this submission will be our education plan including proposed pilots, and of course our all important business plan, a massive commitment to meet during this period. Once we are able it is our intention to share this information with the wider community, and seek their feedback. In parallel with all of this activity fundraising remains high on the list of priorities, and we are still bound by the rules of matched funding that must be delivered to make this project possible. With the closure of the period given over to objections to the CPO, just one has been received. It is thought that the nature of this objection, concerning a previous financial relationship that Ravenclaw had entered into, was unlikely to cause any delay to the ongoing CPO process. The AGM of the Hastings Pier and Whiterock Trust is due to be held at the Whiterock Hotel on Friday May 4th.

The Easter weekend was extremely busy in the Old Town, and traffic movement was heavy. This was noticed especially in the Rock a Nore area where the no loading ban worked very successfully, but without doubt there are a number of other issues that come into play on these busy weekends that require investigation and effective solutions. Almost certainly the problems associated with the handling of increased traffic ingress were compounded by the withdrawal of all rail services coming into the Town. Following the long term closure of the Ore tunnel the rail companies would appear to have little grasp of the needs of a seasonal economy, and the ability of a sixteenth century road system to handle the excess of motorists that their lack of strategic thinking has deposited upon Old Hastings. The investigation into the metalling and designation of Rock a Nore car park continues. It is envisaged that this will provide some additional parking places and a link into an electronic information system that could preclude the abortive journeys along Rock a Nore, that do so much to hinder the free flow of traffic. Additionally ESCC have agreed once again to review the phasing of the traffic signals at Rock a Nore. But it is inevitable that when provision is made for the safe passage of pedestrians over the same piece of ground that is shared with vehicular traffic, there will be an adverse trade off towards the user that originally had exclusive priority. However the introduction of these proposed

changes should go some way towards addressing the one downside of Hastings' ever growing popularity.

On Good Friday I visited the "Making Waves" exhibition of local art at the Stade Community Hall produced by SoCo, this included a supporting programme of talks and workshops. Once again this was a showcase of the extraordinary local talent that abounds in Hastings, and does much to complement the newly opened Jerwood Gallery. During the period I attended the latest meeting of the group that is considering the future of the Old Town Museum. To date the staff have done a terrific job in turning the museum around into a much brighter and more inviting destination for visitors. The value of this exercise has been borne out by increased visitor numbers in all categories, and it is our intention to carry out further improvements on the upper floor. The group are investigating a number of other money making suggestions, including the creation of potential "friends and patrons". I would like to extend this campaign further afield, and link the significant part of the tourism offer created by the museum with other tourist attractions, such that the message is the attraction of the Old Town in total is greater than the sum of its parts.

The fire on the East Hill became a significant item of debate on the agenda of the latest East Hastings Area Management Board. Although neither property nor person sustained injury during the conflagration, it was felt that there were lessons to be learnt from this particular episode, as the most significant in a spate of gorse fires in several parts of the Country Park. This series of fires was also discussed at the Country Park Management Forum, resulting in an investigation into how best a repetition can be avoided. Once completed this report will go into the public domain for further discussion. Following a number of published letters concerning the fencing off of parts of the Country Park, I am very pleased to see that a response from HBC has also been published. Basically the effect on species of flora and fauna caused by commercial farming, needs to be reversed for a country park to be able to exhibit the full bio diversity of its many species. Bio diversity is a measure of the health of the supporting ecosystem, and the work that is currently in place at Fairlight will eventually return the park to a state of sustainable ecological health. Parts of the Country Park are actually designated as special areas of conservation which means our responsibility is elevated to a legal duty to protect the habitat of some of the most important and threatened species within the UK. The outcome of this exercise will eventually manifest itself as an outstanding display of birds, bees, butterflies and flowers for the enjoyment of many generations to come.

After several months of disruption Mount Road and its businesses can at last return to normality. Following the relaying of a new water main a further

incident was reported suggesting that all was not well with the foul drainage in the area. Subsequent investigation discovered a collapsed sewer, which quite possibly had been leaking for some time, Southern Water immediately effected repairs and hopefully the situation will no longer impede the everyday life of residents and traders alike. During the month I attended a workshop set up to discuss the future branding and marketing of Hastings, it was held at UCH and attended by a number of prominent business people and industrialists. It is intended that the outcome of this exercise will result in a brand promise supported by a cogent narrative that will relaunch Hastings as a place to do business, and to this end a number of contributory factors were explored. By the end of the evening we had agreed a list of very powerful arguments for Hastings as a location for both industry and commerce, but we all felt that pride of place should be given to the unexploited opportunities that exist in a town that continues to regenerate in several different directions, supported by new educational establishments and an entrepreneurial infrastructure.

Of all the problems that a ward councillor deals with, by far the most persistently unpleasant is one of dog fouling, particularly in the streets. As a council we intend to introduce further by laws to address the root cause of the problem, which is the minority of irresponsible owners who quite simply fail to follow the most simple of requests to "clean up after your animal". In the Country Park where this problem also exists, we are looking to introduce a new code called the Green Dog Walkers Guide which has found considerable success in the Falkirk area of Scotland. It is a partnership between the local authority and the volunteers who sign up to the code, and it is driven by the philosophy that will attempt to shift public attitudes such that it becomes socially unacceptable to leave dog fouling to become a public nuisance. Doubtless you will hear more of this scheme, especially if it can deliver the success in Hastings that it has in parts of Scotland.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should I be able to assist you in any problems that fall within my gift.

Kind Regards, John Hodges