

## **WARD REPORT – OLD HASTINGS – MARCH 2012**

### **COUNCILLOR JOHN HODGES**

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The period set aside for the owners of the pier to come forward and effect the necessary repairs to the structure has now transpired, and the Borough Council has now commenced the Compulsory Purchase Order process. The actual fixing of the notices to the structure, and the serving of the request took place on March 21st at 09:00am in the morning. This is a lengthy legal undertaking to convince the Secretary of State that all of the factors that surround his decision have been successfully dealt with in a fair and open handed manner, and it is ultimately in the public interest for him to agree to the order. The engineering team continue to meet with a similar group from Worthing Pier where a very useful interchange of advice on the technical issues of marine engineering is shared. The process to develop the Community Showroom continues with our requirement being registered with a potential local funder for the siting of the building between the two light wells adjacent to the old White Rock Baths. Planning permission will be required and providing we can cross all of the hurdles it would be possible for a building to materialise by the Autumn. Our single biggest tasks remain the raising of the matched funding to enable us to draw down the HLF grant, and the development of a sustainable business plan all needed to be in place, before any construction work on the structure can commence.

In keeping with many schools around the country, the St.Leonards Academy entered into the spirit of the forthcoming Olympic Games and the Torch relay by participating in BBC's School Report. A group of pupils took footage of myself being interviewed on the Stade Community Space, where they posed a variety of questions concerning the Torch relay in readiness for a subsequent broadcast on the BBC's website. It was all very professionally carried out, and I wish them well in their project

and hope that it leads to other media opportunities that can only help to promote the ever growing profile of our new academies. As part of the newly formed HS Broadband Team I attended a meeting to set out the objectives that we believe will facilitate the smooth introduction of this new technology into Hastings and St.Leonards. We will be meeting with BT Openreach, and the ESCC Team that has provided some of the funding for this exercise. It is vital that we establish at an early stage the extent of the coverage, obviously commercial considerations feature significantly in this form of investment, and we develop an understanding of how it would be possible to extend coverage if the need was present. Beyond the physical work of fibre distribution to the new "mini exchanges" that you can see already being installed around the Town, there is a need for an education campaign such that there is an understanding of exactly what HS Broadband can deliver, not only to businesses but to the ordinary citizen as well. There is a growing need to provide a common intelligence as to what techniques such as telepresence, teleworking, telehealth etc. can offer to all sections of the community. Broadband is here to stay, and as Town not blessed with the ultimate in real time communications, we must embrace this new technology as a genuine alternative form of access to the world's market places, and to the community in general.

During the month I attended a public exhibition of the plans for the Moreton Centre in Boscobel Road. This is a £7m project that is privately funded to provide a dementia/mental health unit with additional facilities proposed to be built in the existing grounds. My interest in the project centred around the retention in the western end of the Town for a day centre for the elderly. It is painfully obvious that the Isobel Blackman Centre in Old Hastings is now over subscribed and additional facilities are needed quite probably on an ever increasing basis. As always cost is the limiting factor, but hopefully a period of negotiation could find an economically acceptable way forward. I have also been involved in the plans to upgrade the studio flats that form part of

the Torfield sheltered accommodation scheme. This is administered by Amicus Horizon who have given me an absolute assurance, based upon the current round of interviews with the residents, that any of them who have now expressed a desire to return to Torfield upon completion of the work's programme, will be accommodated. This is good news indeed for those who had previously expressed concerns in this direction. Amicus have also introduced a pensions advisor into the scheme, following the recent budget changes to personal allowances, to help residents better understand their optimum entitlement. Amicus have also now given me an assurance that at the very least the first phase of the improvements to the Boyne Road Play Area will be introduced this year. Together with some remedial works undertaken in Lodge Road, this will enhance the general facilities within this part of the ward.

March has indeed been a busy month, especially in the direction of cultural activity with the start of the "Stade Saturdays" programme, and the opening of the Jerwood Gallery. The Jerwood adventure has brought the Town considerable publicity at a national level, our task is to build on this national recognition by developing the business opportunities that will inevitably fall out of an increased, and variable visitor base. Already a new hotel at Rock a Nore is on its way, and a new steak house has opened in High Street, whilst existing successful businesses like the FILO have invested in a new restaurant that will provide high quality cuisine, but more importantly create new jobs. Hopefully this will just be the start of a new phase of economic investment and expansion driven by the Town's commitment to a cultural regeneration strategy. The first Saturday of the new cultural season was opened most appropriately by the internationally recognised group of Cornish singers, Fisherman's Friends, who despite the inclement weather entertained an audience approaching a thousand hearty souls. Not to be outdone the Jerwood Gallery boasted visitor attendance of over two thousand

during its first weekend, long may all of this vital support continue.

During the month I attended a meeting with several others including Peter Skinner MEP, Paul Joy representing the Hastings Fisherman's Protection Society and Sarah Owen. The subject matter once again consisted of the iniquitous methods employed in the allocation of quotas. To date some realignment of Fixed Quota Allocation has been achieved, but with very little advantage to our own under ten metre fleet. Peter Skinner has promised to look at the problem from the EU perspective, whilst I have contacted DEFRA in an attempt to understand the formulae used in the conversion of FQAs to tonnage by specific species. Hopefully an understanding of the importance of the fishing industry to Hastings, and the community for whom it provides a way of life will come out of this exercise, but for it to succeed there has to be a will to make it happen at the very highest national level.

Effective from March 19th the new experimental traffic order introducing a no loading ban between declared times, and a rearrangement of the no waiting zones in Rock a Nore Road was introduced. This followed a period of consultation with residents, traders and the disability forum who have all agreed to this trial in an effort to circumvent the continuing problems of traffic jams during the holiday period. Discussions and costings continue on the resurfacing and designation of the existing Rock a Nore car park, and with the application of linear programming techniques it is hoped to significantly increase its capacity such that expected visitor increase as a result of the Jerwood Gallery can be absorbed.

It was most distressing to witness the recent gorse fire and the devastation that it caused to the ecology of the East Hill, but fortunately its progress was arrested before it could cause damage to property, or threaten the well being of the local residents. As a council we continue to invest in the Country Park,

recognising it as the green jewel in our crown, and any damage to its attractiveness is deeply regretted by us all. In fact Old Hastings is probably one of the greenest wards in the Town, not only are we blessed with part of the Country Park, the slopes of Torfield and High Wickham, but we can also boast the largest amount of land in any ward given over to protected allotments. In keeping with the rest of the Town we continue to promote the healthy activity of cycling, actively support our sustainable fishing industry, whilst we successfully reduce carbon emissions year on year. As a Town we are committed to the well being of our citizens, and the wonderful ecology that is part of our heritage.

Please do not hesitate to contact if I can offer help or support on any of your local issues, wishing you all a happy and peaceful Easter.

John Hodges