

## WARD REPORT – OLD HASTINGS – OCTOBER 2012

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Although October has outwardly been a quiet month for the pier, there has been fervent activity in the background in preparation for the visit of the Heritage Lottery Board. This massively important and final visit will take place on Friday November 9th, when a selected but composite group will be interviewed to establish the final case for grant funding towards the pier's restoration. With the Secretary of State's agreement to the compulsory purchase order already in place, the agreement of the HLF to support the programme with grant funding is absolutely vital to the order being taken up and vested in the pier trust. But even success in this part of the exercise is not the end of the road as the trust still has to raise the matched funding to complete the deal with the HLF, and in this the help of the public and the supporters of the pier is all important.

Earlier in the month both Dawn and myself marched with four hundred other equally concerned citizens to express our views, concerning the proposals to downgrade the Ridge Fire Station, at the subsequent public meeting held at the Ore Centre. In summary it was a united voice that said think again, the consequential risks of such an ill considered proposal were too great to the safety of citizens in the North and East of the Borough. The point should also be made that quite possibly our neighbours in the adjoining Rother district would be placed at even greater risk owing to the inevitable increase in attendance times by the fire appliances that would be experienced. In terms of Old Hastings I had previously written a comprehensive letter to the Fire Authority pointing out the very special conditions that

abound within the ward especially in the Old Town itself. Many of the cottages are hundreds of years old when flame retardancy within basic building materials was not a consideration, there are rows of cottages built without any form of fire break. The whole area has developed within a steep sided valley, with the lateral running streets joined by narrow twittens which preclude the proximity of fire tenders should the source of a conflagration occur in any one of them. We all remember clearly earlier this year the huge gorse fire on the East Hill that threatened Tackleway, to a point where the emergency services ordered an evacuation. This sort of action surely demonstrated the deep concerns that a fire in this area held for our professional fire fighters, but only a few months later this incident was followed by a proposal to downgrade the most accessible station to the Old Town, and the potential tinder box presented by the gorse covered East Hill.

My letter had also suggested a Plan B, that should the parlous economic circumstances that continue to surround the effective operation of our emergency services drive further reductions, then they should be taken at a "back office" level to include not only a sharing of personnel, but the usage of common premises as well. Should both Plan A and Plan B find no support then the default conditions by necessity would have to involve widespread and expensive plans for education in fire prevention together with risk assessments down to street level that recognise the vastly varying levels of susceptibility to fire presented by a Town where its buildings cover some seven hundred years. There would be strong technical reasons why the basic methods of fire fighting and the materials used, could need reconsidering when presented with a fire that would be more soundly established because of the lapse in response times. And none of these arguments have yet touched upon the increased dangers that our fire fighters would inevitably face, We will all fight on until common sense prevails and cuts are taken in areas that do not threaten public safety.

At this month's cabinet meeting a new waste collection contract was agreed, this will be run jointly with Eastbourne, Rother, and Wealden councils and will bring in savings for Hastings of some £600,000 per annum. Previously a new grounds maintenance scheme had also been negotiated in conjunction with our largest housing association and the Foreshore Trust, once again resulting in significant savings for the Town. Both of these contracts are fine examples of the benefits that can be sourced in this form of joint negotiation out of the economies of scale. It is not a question of reducing standards to effect financial advantage, as other benefits that will come out of this contract include doorstep collections of plastic, glass, paper, cardboard, and tetrapaks. This will hugely improve our re-cycling record and add yet another plus to our already highly creditable record for being the greenest council ever, one that really considers the environment and the legacy that we will leave for generations yet to come.

Further good news for Hastings comes by way of the number of new shops that have opened not only in the Old Town but in St.Leonards and the Town centre, including two new outlets that will be opening in Priory Meadow. This resilience that is being displayed by the business community of our Town is remarkable, but it does not mean that the ever present recessive pressures are receding. There is still much work to be done in this direction in returning a confidence to the market place, it needs the wages born out of employment to fuel the fire of recovery and once more return a shape to the day and a pattern to the lives of those who the recession has cast aside. Hastings Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) who sometime ago were awarded a million pounds of EU funding have now commissioned their first projects. The wheels in Brussels turn even slower than those in Westminster, but the time has now come to fit out the sea food teaching kitchen in the Stade Community Hall, order the replacement bulldozers that will reduce the shingle gradient on the fishing beach, and get the Herring Fair underway for its launch on November 23rd. All of these projects, together with several others connected with the local fishing industry, will bring tangible benefits to the Old Town community, yes belatedly but nevertheless most welcome. We are also investigating the

possibility of some form of transport to run along the seafront from Rock a Nore in the east to the old Bathing Pool site in the west. This is at an early stage, and there remains above all a convincing business case to be put together. There is an exciting proposal to put an artwork on Pelham roundabout, this has now taken a step closer, with the Hastings Arts Trust (funded by David and Sarah Kowitz) formally announcing its £100,000 sculpture prize for a public art commission, to be placed on the roundabout, replacing the old 1960s fountain. Improvement to the roundabout will be made too, replacing the unsightly concrete edging, and probably making the roundabout smaller. A shortlist of internationally-acclaimed artists has been drawn up by a panel established by Hastings Arts Trust (including Michael Foster) – the shortlist includes the Hastings-born Chapman Brothers. Three designs will be chosen, and an exhibition held for the public to express their preferences. The final design will still need planning permission, following which the work would be formally commissioned, built and installed, next year.

The experimental traffic order, which appears to have worked very well in precluding parked cars from adding to the inevitable traffic congestion in Rock a Nore, is now due for review. This will be accomplished by the calling of a public meeting that will consider the views of residents and traders alike. The long awaited review of traffic generally in the Old Town will take place in mid November this year. This review will consider amongst other influences, the impact on traffic movement caused by the Jerwood Gallery, and the introduction of the traffic lights at the A259/Rock a Nore junction. It will also consider the impact of these lights on local bus services and their ability to maintain their operating schedules. The outcomes from this report will be available in February 2013, and amongst other uses they will inform the current work that is being undertaken regarding potential pedestrian improvements in High Street.

During the month Hastings Week, with all of its wonderful attractions has come and gone in the blaze of its usual success, culminating in a superb procession, bonfire, and fireworks display. Certainly the most oft used phrase in the Old Town was "the best ever", yet another challenge to be faced by the organisers when they consider next year's offering. But all is not

over for this season of entertainment, Hastings tremendous and ever expanding calendar of events, has still more to offer for this year. The Hastings Story Telling Festival arrives again starting on November 12th with special emphasis on children, but subsequently providing entertainment for all ages through the week until November 18th when four hours of stories will be delivered in the open air of the Stade. This excellent programme of events, under the patronage of Quentin Blake the man who brought to life Roald Dahl's books through his illustrations, seeks to revive the traditional form of entertainment provided through story telling. The festival is entitled "Fishy Tales" and its regular recurrence now adds a completely different dimension to Hastings offer of an all year round programme of public entertainment. From a metaphorical allusion to the attributes of fish, to the presentation of a very real one as November 23rd brings us to another celebration of the sea and its fruits. The revival of the "Herring Fair" which traditionally took place around the time of St.Clements Day is planned to bring yet further pleasurable diversion for all who are in Hastings in late Autumn. Surely our Town must rival anywhere in these islands as a source of diverse entertainment covering every month of the calendar, and every aspect of human enjoyment.

Please do not hesitate to contact either Dawn or myself with any concerns that you might have, and are within our gift to resolve.

Kind Regards Dawn Poole and John Hodges