

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

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As the great news regarding the Heritage Lottery Fund's grant, that looks to have secured the pier's future, begins to sink in so does the message that further matched funding remains to be secured. Half a million pounds are already secured, but this still leaves a further two million pounds to be found. Currently applications have been made to a number of sources including the Coastal Communities Fund, Community Builders, and a fund that recognises the financial help required by community groups acquiring assets of community value. Beyond the call on these organisations set up to promote projects within the community, The Trust intends to launch a community share issue in the New Year to complement its existing scheme whereby the public are being invited to "sponsor a plank" on the new pier, with which one receives a certificate recording your generosity , please see (<http://hpwrt.co.uk/how-you-can-help/adopt-a-plank/>) Hopefully these schemes will all bear fruit, and together deliver the necessary funding to allow construction to begin, and give back to Hastings the focal point that was so tragically taken away from it.

Further really good news came this month in terms of securing the future of St. Mary in the Castle as a performing arts centre. The Borough Council have now entered into a tenancy agreement with Buckswood School, located just outside of the Borough but an organisation that is very much part of what is good about Hastings. Their vision is to establish St Mary in the Castle as a cultural destination for the South East, encouraging a wide range of cultural activities not least the continuation of this iconic building as a performing arts centre. A charitable trust is being set up to enable funding to be sought to further enhance

both the building and the range of activities that will be extended to include children from the state sector of education. This is probably the best solution that could have been found in terms of providing both a sustainable future for the building, and encompassing the diverse needs of those who have supported SMIC over many years of uncertainty. Well done to Buckswood School, and let us all provide the support that will help them deliver yet another jewel in the cultural crown that Hastings now wears with some undoubted justification.

It is also pleasing to report that a refurbished playground will reopen in January thanks to the support of Hastings Borough Council, in conjunction with the Clive Vale Residents Association. This project, located at the end of Boyne Road, first came to my notice nearly three years ago, when residents complained most vehemently about the very poor facilities that serviced this corner of Hastings. Several meetings with Amicus Horizon took place and eventually other funders came on board including Britvic/ Schweppes, Groundwork South East, and the Veolia Environmental Trust. This has resulted in a real advance in play facilities whereby children are not only introduced to physiological exercise, but also to equipment that allows new methods and styles of play to be explored. A superb example of the community working together through CVRA, involving business and the local council, and delivering a splendid new asset to the young people of Clive Vale.

During the month I visited the Singleton Environmental Centre at Ashford, the purpose of the visit was to explore potential models for a new interpretation centre for the Hastings Country Park. As chair of the Country Park Management Committee we have for some time recognised the need to replace the aged and strictly limited facility that currently exists. It is intended that the proceeds of the eventual sale of Warren Cottage will be used to start the funding for this project, but very much like the pier significant amounts of matched funding must also be

raised. Any such centre must also be financially sustainable and be strongly based upon education for young people. It must also build a reputation as a first class facility for the interpretation of all aspects of the Country Park, together with the exploitation of the world class paleo-botanical specimens that form part of the cliff face. Whilst the pier intends to provide a classroom based upon the heritage of the seaside, and the contribution that our pier itself has made to the evolution of British social history, and along on the Stade we have a classroom on the coast exploiting the contribution of the sea's harvest to our Town, the Country Park classroom will bring its own unique contribution. Very much like the classroom on the coast it will be based upon ecological development, its impact upon man's relationship with his environment, sustainability of our most precious assets, and provide yet another milestone along the green path that your council continues to tread.

It is with enormous relief to report that common sense finally prevailed with the East Sussex Fire Authority, and the future of the Ridge Fire Station has been secured. This was in no small way due to people power with some 8,000 local people signing petitions, having spent some time at various locations around the Town I can only say that in terms of public support it was like pushing against the proverbial open door. Regarding Old Hastings, and especially parts of the Old Town which were built before flame retardancy was invented. I did put forward a number of irrefutable technical arguments based upon a combination of timing, the ability to fight what would be greater conflagrations, and the danger presented to our fire fighters under these circumstances. The point was also made that significant coats would also be incurred with a need for street level risk assessments, and for a programme of fire prevention to be rolled out, however this could be still be introduced but this time on a basis of common sense in the home, with the hope that it could reduce the level of future calls made upon the emergency services.

Unfortunately the same level of commonsense that secured our second fire station did not prevail in the decision that now seeks to deprive Hastings of its only stroke unit. There is nothing wrong with the aspiration to develop a centre of excellence for the treatment, and rehabilitation of stroke victims. But this decision came out of a morass of confused agendas, the fact Eastbourne would not be the treatment centre for all stroke victims, and that the additional time added to the delay between incident and diagnosis may prove too great for some. Every town that has a hospital similar to the Conquest should have the provision, to accept anyone who has collapsed in the street from a cardio-vascular condition, provide the CT scan information that upon interpretation will direct the patient to the appropriate treatment location, and if necessary provide the stabilisation that will allow a patient to undergo that travel once their condition has been established. The treatment location depending upon the diagnosis may not be Eastbourne, it may be Brighton or even London. It is not necessary for 24/7 expert opinion to be on site at the Conquest, as the output of the CT scan can be sent electronically, in a digitised format, to wherever on the face of this planet the relevant expertise is located. We have the technology to preserve life.....let us use it, but save money where public health and safety is not placed in jeopardy.

Although some repairs to pavements and kerbs have been effected, and also some railings have been repainted in Old Hastings, there still remains a number of areas where works remain outstanding. I will pursue these in the New Year with emphasis on those that are impacting health and safety, although I am the first to admit that a poorly maintained townscape can go beyond basic safety and provide little encouragement and support for our burgeoning tourism offer. I have been approached by a number of residents who believe that the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit in Ashburnham Road would serve to remove its attractiveness as a "rat run" that circumvents the lights at the Sussex Arms junction. I would appreciate your

inputs into this question, together with any other information where dangerous levels of speed are also prevalent in the ward.

I have long been convinced that employment is the real alternative to spending cuts and austerity, and it is not difficult to see why it is so important to our country's future. Until economic growth delivers more taxes into the Treasury no deficit reduction can take place without the cuts to public spending that continue to hit the most vulnerable within our society. Employment can of course be created at a national level by investing in many much needed infrastructure projects. It is unlikely that money will ever be as cheap to borrow as it is now, and capital projects involving construction do not require massive imports, and will therefore not adversely affect our balance of payments. There is however another way based upon the facts that certain industries will flourish as clusters within specific locations around the UK. Hastings is no exception to that rule. In the New Year we intend to commence a project with the aims of attracting new business and investment into Hastings, with the objective of creating new jobs. As a town that continues to suffer from limited communications by conventional transport, with only High Speed Broadband as a potential alternative route to the marketplaces of the world, we must look to build upon those industries that can flourish and prosper under these constraints. Within Hastings and its immediate hinterland there are a number of such industries that have developed in clusters, and very often operate in value chains before delivering their final product to the end customer. Later in the year it is our intent to provide a platform for the first of these clusters, in this instance a high technology sector, to show the rest of the country how these companies have succeeded in developing world class solutions to some of the most challenging problems that face science today. It is not only these industries that provide such an attraction to new business in this area, but the college and the university who can provide a supply of talented and trained employees, all in a part of East Sussex where brand new industrial premises are soon to be built

in support. Already this concept has found encouragement with the UK's innovation agency, the Technology Strategy Board, who are looking to support clusters that can demonstrate world class capabilities and represent vibrant developing sectors. I will keep you appraised as this concept develops.

I think that it is time for us to sign off, a few lines short of "War and Peace", and take the opportunity to wish you all a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

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