

# Hastings Old Town Residents Association

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## January 2013 Newsletter

### Hastings Old Town – never a dull moment

As the cogs of the Worlds clock turn again the Old Town has much to offer residents and visitors. The awful World recession continues to demonstrate the shift in wealth and income generation from the Old World of the West to the even older World of the East. This unstoppable movement will increasingly affect each and every one of us. The challenge for our local and national leaders is to achieve damage limitation to the quality of peoples lives, based on clear principles of equity and equality. Or is this an armchair dream ?

Congratulations Sir Quentin Blake

It was good to see that this well earned honour has been given to this famous artist. Quentin Blake gained a world wide reputation as illustrator for Roald Dahl. His citation mentions services as an illustrator. More recently Quentin has done much work producing hospital murals. He readily agreed to become Patron of the Hastings Storytelling Festival. This year his book signing was the best attended event of the week, demonstrating his considerable popularity.

Perhaps the Jerwood Gallery will find space to feature his talents ?

Markets – a suitable choice for the Stade Open Space.

HOTRA's survey of the wishes of local residents showed that, after Arts events, markets would be very welcome. The Seafood and Wine Festival succeeds because it is good quality and well promoted. Lets hope that more happen in future attracting commercial activity to the Old Town,

### Membership

**£10 per person is due from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January. Please make cheques payable to HOTRA and include your contact and email details. Pop it in an envelope marked HOTRA and leave at Nelson House Antiques, High Street, or with Phil White, 8 and a half Exmouth Place.**

## The Foreshore Trust

The Foreshore Trust is a rather unusual charity. Originally it was suggested when Queen Victoria was on the throne. Yet it took the failed [thankfully ] attempt to build a hotel on Pelham beach to bring it to reality. Immense legal costs and an independent Protector have given Hastings the potential for a town-changing charity.

Its first duty is to secure and improve its asset of the foreshore from Rock a Nore to West Marina. This provides income through rents and car parking charges. {Resurfacing and redesigning of Pelham car park will start soon, and provide extra spaces.} This gives year round employment and the potential for continuing improvements.

The second duty of the Foreshore Trust is to distribute its surplus income to local good causes. In a town with so many needs it is essential that income earning is maximised in order that the best possible amounts are available to the wider community.

When setting up the Foreshore Trust the Charity Commission gave Lead Trustee status to Hastings Council. 3 councillors form the Foreshore Trust Charity Committee. They have a duty to consult with the local community, mainly through the Coastal Users Group. This ad-hoc committee existed before the Foreshore Trust was formally set up. One of the challenges facing Hastings Council is learning how to operate a charity. In the case of the Foreshore Trust there needs to be openness and a commitment to achieve the highest possible standards in its administration, consultation and all its processes.

So far in some parts of its processes the Trust has done well. It wisely sought the advice of Hastings Voluntary Action. The Trust has now held 2 rounds of grant distribution giving away £100,000 to the wider Hastings community. It still needs to improve the way it consults. The clarity of its paperwork needs to shift up a gear. The Coastal Users Group needs adequate time to consider proposals. For instance the recent review of the Business Plan was only available for a few days before the meeting.

Lets hope that the new Chairperson Cllr John Hodges can oversee improvements that will not only deliver a more attractive seafront but support the concept of the Common Good.

## **Stade Amusement Park**

The current 21 year lease was signed in 1996. It is largely based on the Landlord and Tenant Act. Henry Morton holds the lease. Within the terms of the lease he has sublet parts of the site to others. The whole site is looking tired and contrasts poorly with the Stade area works and the Crazy Golf area. The crazy golf site has seen significant improvement over the past few years.

This area on the seafront has also been added to by the multi use games area and the childrens playground. This was achieved following sustained pressure from HOTRA. The work was paid for by the Foreshore Trust.

The sand Volleyball court was paid for by Chris Richards who manages the Golf site tenancy on behalf of the Arnold Palmer group. To raise the money to cover the cost of the redesigned golf courses and the Volleyball court a 50 year lease was granted by Hastings Council. [This was several years before the Foreshore Trust was established. ]

Henry Morton has recognised the need to invest in the Stade Amusement Park. He has given local people opportunity to comment on the initial ideas – HOTRA organised an open meeting. The Coastal Users Group has also looked in detail at the first set of proposals. There have been criticisms that hopefully have been heard. Henry Morton has asked that the new lease includes his commitment to consult with local residents in future on any major changes. He has of course earned substantial income. That's business I am told. But at least the rent is always paid.

The December Coastal Users Group meeting discussed many aspects around these ideas, especially the possible extension of the Miniature railway. But, very unfairly, it was not

made clear to those attending that a 50 year lease was proposed. The subsequent meeting of the Foreshore Trust Charity Committee was the first time this became fully understood. Even the councillors and Protector were taken aback by the 50 years proposed.

HOTRA was very vexed at the way this aspect was handled. It was on page 67 of the Agenda papers – which totalled nearly 100 pages. Try reading that amount on-line !

## **Reality has to be faced**

Some of the basic truths are

- 1] Henry Morton has an unchallengeable right to a further lease.
- 2] There is no enforceable requirement on him to make any improvements. He could leave things as they are now.
- 3] He is willing to spend nearly £600,000 on the upgrade having taken into account various local opinions.
- 4] The Foreshore Trust commissioned an independent report from Grimleys. This is a requirement of the Charity Commissioners. The report is linked to similar sites around the UK
- 5] The lease has been significantly strengthened and made more enforceable. Issues like noise nuisance have been especially considered.
- 6] The rent has been raised above the rate of inflation
- 7] Bank finance packages would all require a 50 year lease.

The Foreshore Trust Chairperson, Cllr John Hodges is a man of the highest integrity. He has given an undertaking to re-check the advice provided by Grimleys. He will secure the best possible outcome in such a tight legal corner.

The revised drawings will be shared with HOTRA and the Coastal Users Group. Thereafter the legal and Planning processes begin. At that point there would be further opportunity to object. The duration of this stage can be hard to predict. It is unlikely that any significant work can start before the summer.

But the end result could be a greatly enhanced site with many more free facilities for families, children and the disabled to enjoy. The Boating Lake will be aerated because of the fountain filtration process. This focal point for visitors may be eye catching – even Pirate catching !