

WARD REPORT – OLD HASTINGS – JANUARY – 2013

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GENERAL NEWS

As the pier progresses towards the ultimate ownership of the structure by the Trust, the ever important drive towards fund raising continues through the "adopt a plank initiative" and the soon to be launched community share issue. Both of these schemes are absolutely vital to the funding that the Trust must raise as a match towards the Heritage Lottery Grant. Behind the scenes work is underway on bringing to prominence, and subsequently delivering the ownership of the pier to the Hastings Pier Charity. I think that it is important that the public understand the vast amount of not only construction work that must take place to deliver a working pier, but also the legal issues that surround such a complex operation. The job is not finished until all of this is in place. Probably the first new addition to the area around the pier that will rise will be the Education Hub and Engineering Eye, previously referred to as the Community Showroom. This is a key element in meeting the HLF's requirement for education and community programmes, and will provide a vital link between the pier's past and its future. It will also serve as a contact point between the public and the pier project, and feature high on the list as a focus for fund raising activities.

The Borough Council's Cabinet agreed new arrangements for council tax benefit this week with the government cutting the money for council tax support by 10%. The new arrangements involve changes to council tax exemptions including empty homes, as well as some changes for those who have been receiving council tax benefit. Currently the council pays out

around £12 million per year in council tax benefit to those people who are eligible and the government reimburses us. The system is demand led and therefore the more people who qualify, the more subsidy the government gives us. Starting from April, this is going to change. The government will give the council a fixed amount . If more residents become eligible for support there is no additional money to help them – we will have to find it ourselves. And the government will cut the fixed amount by 10% – around £1.2 million. Therefore that £1.2 million has to be made up by changing discounts and/or paying out less to claimants.

The council consulted on a number of changes during the Autumn and essentially those now being implemented received majority support from the residents who responded. Then at the eleventh hour the government offered local councils £100 million back from the £400 million it saves from that 10% reduction in total council tax benefit payments. Hastings is being offered £277,000. The offer is only for one year and is given with certain conditions, particularly that no claimant who currently has nothing to pay should have any more than 8.5% of their council tax bill to pay.

With this money coming back from the government, and by changing some of the discounts, the cost of keeping broadly the same system as now is around £230,000. We will do our best to meet this, but at the moment only for the one year of the government's funding. The changes to discounts will see the scrapping of the 10% discount for second homes, a reduction in the discount for empty properties under repair from 100% to 50%, and for empty unfurnished properties a reduction in the exemption from six months to one month. Properties left empty for over two years will be charged an extra 50% on their council tax.

As for those receiving council tax support there will now be a minimum payment of £5, there will be a reasonable increase in the deductions made for non-dependents living in the household we are in work. The rebate given to householders not entitled to

benefit, but who have a second adult in their home will be removed. Of the 12,000 households in the town (one third of the total) currently receiving council tax benefit 37% are pensioners whose entitlements the government ruled could not be changed. Of the remainder 1,200 are employed and still entitled to council tax benefit. It has been a very hard job trying to be fair and limit the impact of these changes. I believe that we have done the best we can.

WARD NEWS

The really good news for those who live in the Tackleway area and in the twittens that run between there and All Saints Street, is the agreement by the Borough Council to fund the creation of a fire break. This will be sited along the top of the East Hill wall for the prescribed depth consistent with its effectiveness in preventing the passage of fire. Currently investigations are in place to seek a method or a material that will prevent foliage and bushes growing back into the cleared space, and consequently reduce any annual maintenance costs. Following our successful campaign to retain the Ridge Fire Station as a fully operational unit, together with the introduction of this new fire break, has greatly reduced the risk of a major conflagration devastating Old Hastings, but with fire we must never be complacent.

It looks increasingly likely that a "new" trader's organisation will be reformed to serve the commercial needs of the Old Town. Hastings Old Town Trader's Association will combine the merits and strengths of the George Street Traders and the High Street Traders, and hopefully find a place at the table for those who trade in the other areas of this busy commercial district. It is not intended that this united approach will in any way detract from the many community based functions that the separate organisations currently deliver so very well. What is so important about this combined approach is the strength of the lobby, and the loudness of the voice that this larger organisation can deliver.

This is especially important with many of the most important functions to a trader such as on street parking and highways, now being administered from Lewes. The whole argument around the loss of these services to the County revolved around the rapport that had developed between the individual traders and the wardens, and the flexibility of the Borough Council in responding to seasonal needs in parking management. Hopefully the new regime will understand that on street parking should be seen as part of their responsibility towards the facilitation and sustainability of trading, and the "new big stick" that has now been created, should not have to be produced to emphasise that vital point

The snow looks like it has finally left our corner of the UK, by and large life carried on almost as normal, with trading all but reaching normal levels. Thanks for making this happen must in no small part go to the excellent work, in keeping the main roads and the popular shopping areas functional, by both our County Council, and to the Hastings Council whose performance in this time of emergency was outstanding amongst the boroughs and districts that comprise East Sussex. I should also like to report that work has already commenced on repairing many of the "new pot holes" that have occurred as a result of this latest inclement weather. Should you discover any new pot holes in your area the following link should point you in the right direction for remedial action to be requested [Road – pot holes and general condition](#)

It is always pleasing to report on the green credentials of our council, no more so than when all of our services are under severe financial pressures emanating from the loss of significant levels of funding, but we manage to deliver an exemplary standard of care in that area. Despite the significant calls placed upon the Ranger Service, including our new responsibilities in the Combe Valley Countryside park, the service will continue to provide for the enjoyment that all of our many green spaces deliver. The work of the Ranger Service not only includes the principles of countryside stewardship, but has the responsibility

of implementing the Hastings Country Park Management Plan, and developing the community and volunteer groups that work alongside them. The group also provide a professional level of arboriculture management for the many species of trees that Hastings can boast. This is a far reaching service that operates throughout the Borough, and has evolved in recognition of the importance of our "green lungs" and the healthy living that they can contribute to an otherwise urbanised society.

With February upon us one of our newer and most impressive local events hits the streets, this is of course the very fast growing Hastings Fat Tuesday Festival which runs this year from the 8th to the 12th of the month. To the purists and the Europhiles this is our own celebration of Mardi Gras interpreted in a music and arts festival, and celebrated with its own brand of liquid refreshment most appropriately called "Fat Tuesday Laughing Jester Cider". Yet another reason why Hastings is so famously festive, and able to prompt the oft spoken words "Let's go to Hastings, there's always something happening there !"

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