

WARD REPORT - OLD HASTINGS - APRIL 2013

COUNCILLOR JOHN HODGES (cllr.john.hodges@hastings.gov.uk or 445540)

General issues

The date for the big handover of the pier (lots of TV, handshakes, giant keys, that sort of thing) to the Pier Trust is scheduled for a date in June, the exact timing will be announced subsequently. There still remains considerable detail to be finalised, such as security and insurance, but if all goes according to plan, then June will be that date. This will mean the Borough Council serving the General Vesting Declaration three weeks before that. At the expiry of this three-week period, HBC automatically take ownership of the pier and immediately transfer it to the Pier Trust. In parallel with all of these legal activities the quest for further funding still continues through the launch of the community share offer, and the scheme to sponsor a plank. Above all these funds are needed to provide the Team with a level of working capital consistent with such a huge project.

Local issues

The retaining wall outside of no. 77 Harold Road has subsided. As a result the County Highway's Section has closed the footway and half of the road, and controlled the traffic with two way lights whilst propping up the wall. They are now in the process of designing a permanent replacement wall. Construction of the permanent wall will take place in April/May and the temporary lights could be in place until then. The County Highway's Section will be monitoring the movement of the wall, and the footway and the lights could be removed before that date. They have decided that the safest and easiest way to construct a replacement retaining wall is to install reinforced concrete piles at the back of the footway, and then take down the old wall and construct a new one.

Dudley Infants has had a very successful Ofsted report gaining a 'good' designation, up on its 'satisfactory' following the previous inspection. All Saints primary which unfortunately went into special measures last year following its Ofsted report continues to make steady progress. The school governors were replaced by an appointed Interim Executive Board but the timescale for move

to an academy will be determined by central government. Our County Councillor will be pressing for a full opportunity for involvement and consultation with staff and parents.

It is intended to introduce some changes in the operation of the Isabel Blackman Centre in the Old Town, following the findings of last year's evaluation. They comprise three specific functions within the Centre.

Relocate the day opportunities service to the ground floor.

It has been agreed that the day opportunities service will move to the ground floor and will occupy the whole of the ground floor. It is anticipated that this move will take place by the middle of May at the latest. It has also been decided that, in order to ensure the security of the day care clients, the downstairs area will need to have coded access doors into the centre.

To relocate the Community Hub to the first floor

The hub programme will inevitably be affected by the move upstairs. The decision has been taken to reduce the activities programme whilst the internal relocation of services at the centre takes place. All activity leaders, hirers & clients will be informed of their activity end and start dates. Age UK East Sussex and ESCC will also be reviewing the scope and model of community hub activity over coming months.

Café

Services provided by the café will inevitably be affected by this move. The cafe will continue to provide meals as normal until the move takes place. Once this move starts and/or the coded access doors are being used, there will be different arrangements to enable people to use the café. The cafe will continue to provide for the day opportunities service, for activities on the reduced hub programme or for pre-booked group meals.

It was extremely pleasing to attend the first Stade Market on Good Friday, the standard of merchandise on sale was of the highest quality and covered an excellent range of products. Despite flurries of snow it was well attended, and I sincerely hope that the current spate of cold and wet weather does not work against what could become yet another regular event for both locals and tourists alike.

During the month I have attended meetings as a member of the team that is coordinating the City of Culture bid, a project that has really captured the enthusiasm and support of the citizens of Hastings. There is little doubt, that despite the formidable list of competing towns, we have a real opportunity of stamping our very obvious pedigree on this competition. We are long on our history, long on our creative talent, and we abound with many real examples of how we as a community express our culture. But let us not forget how quickly Hastings can respond to changing times, with many of our leading businesses having been "forged in the white heat of technology". And whilst I cannot claim that it was "Hastings man" who first controlled fire and used it to develop the wheel, we can most certainly assert our right to have born witness to the very first image to be transmitted by television, the precursor to every form of image transfer that today we take for granted. Currently the team of bid writers is hard at it putting our contribution together for a first round submission by April 30th, our fingers are crossed but as we have declared "Hastings is the place where it all began, and it is now beginning all again".

At the end of month I attended a public exhibition and consultation on the proposed improvements to the boating lake area of the Stade. This event was hosted by HOTRA, with the representative of the head lease holder, and myself as Chair of the Charity Committee present. The event was well attended by local residents including our Member of Parliament, with everyone being given the opportunity to formally record their comments. It is always extremely pleasing to witness the great interest that people take in their Town, and hopefully their freely expressed views will help to aesthetically shape the final design of this most important part of our tourism offer.

In response to a number of questions regarding the quality of our bathing water, and its potential impact on our status as a "bucket and spade" holiday resort, I append a resume of the current situation at end of this report. As the report indicates there has been no deterioration in the quality of our bathing water, and in fact much is being done to improve it.

Please do not hesitate to contact myself with any concerns that you might have with regards to the ward, and are within my gift to resolve.

Kind Regards John Hodges

Bathing Water Quality

The Environment Agency tests the bathing water at Hastings and St. Leonards bathing beaches each week between May and September (20 weeks each year). The tests are based on the EC Bathing Water Directive and detect levels of coliform contamination. Under the current EU standard, the results for the past 5 years were:

Quality	Hastings Beach			St Leonards Beach	
	Low	Good	Excellent	Good	Excellent
2012		7	13	6	14
2011	1	6	13	2	18
2010		6	14	3	17
2009		4	16	4	16
2008		12	8	4	16

If 80% of results are Excellent, the overall quality is judged Excellent. This is the rating that St. Leonards held for several years until 2012, when the quality dropped as periods of excessive rainfall caused overflows in the town's drainage system.

Overall, bathing water quality has been consistently 'excellent' or 'good' under the current standards. However, in 2015 a new EU standard will be introduced and will significantly raise the level at which water quality can be recommended for bathing.

At their current levels of water quality, both Hastings and St. Leonards will struggle to meet the new standard, as will most of our neighbours along the southeast coast. From 2015, if bathing water is classed as poor, local authorities must advertise this on signage advising against bathing.

The Environment Agency and Southern Water have been examining the causes of bathing water contamination, such as misconnections, highway drainage, foul and surface water sewer problems, over the last year in order to bring the town up to the new standard. Works will continue throughout the summer and have already been carried out in the catchment at the Alexandra Park side of Old Roar Ghyll. Inspectors have also identified a number of incorrectly connected drainage pipes from kitchen sinks, washing machine and bathrooms, sometimes from entire houses. Householders will be notified of this and asked to correct the misconnections.

The EA and HBC have installed a 'Smart Sponge'(basically a desilting device) in Alexandra Park to filter water as it passes through the park on its way to the sea. This is a trial of new technology and is being assessed for effectiveness.

Southern Water is carrying out improvements throughout their local infrastructure, including at Rock a Nore, West Marina and Galley Hill. Discharges into the sea at times of excessive water levels continue to be closely monitored and limited by statute. It may be that the ultimate answer will involve an extension to the long sea outfall pipes but this is a costly option that will take several years to be authorised and then to build.

Our bathing water is not getting worse but the standards against which it is judged will get much higher in 2015. HBC recognises the seriousness of a poor rating for a seaside town and is working closely with the Environment Agency and Southern Water to ensure that the necessary improvements and corrections are made before 2015.