

## WARD REPORT - OLD HASTINGS - MAY 2013

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### **General issues**

There is little to report on events that affect the pier this month, as most of what is happening concerns the plethora of bureaucratic processes that must be traversed prior to the commencement of physical progress. Despite all of this red tape, insurance for the structure has now been arranged which unlocks the process of serving the vesting declaration, which given a fair wind may allow an official handover of the pier sometime in July. One step forward has been an agreement between HBC and the Pier Trust to allow the development of part of the White Rock Baths promenade structure as a community showroom. This will facilitate an information link and a commercial outlet between those who will be delivering the reconstruction programme, and the general public.

With the loss of on street parking management and enforcement to ESCC, I thought that a brief resume of its history and its transfer to NSL might be of interest and put this issue into the context of what our Town has lost.

On Street parking enforcement was introduced in May 1999 with the Borough acting as the agent for East Sussex County Council. Since that time the service had developed into a comprehensive and cohesive service drawing together on and off street parking, CCTV monitoring and radio communications, which also supported Bar Watch, Shop Watch and the effective coordination of front line services in the event of civil emergencies and major incidents and the Council's out of hours emergency service.

Operation Locust in Stockleigh Road saw the introduction of the pioneering new approach to dealing with abandoned and untaxed vehicles which dramatically changed the street scene by almost eliminating unsightly and dangerous abandoned vehicles and improved road safety by removing untaxed and often uninsured vehicles which almost inevitably had no MoT either. The scheme attracted national publicity and has been replicated elsewhere. It has been replaced by a new focus on untaxed vehicles by the DVLA and the Police and we have now joined Operation Crackdown, a Sussex

wide scheme coordinated by Sussex Police to deal with abandoned and untaxed vehicles but also antisocial driving and speeding.

Expansion of the CCTV system into car parks saw car crime almost eliminated and dual monitoring of the street CCTV cameras enabled the service to support the parking team, the Police and the community, providing reassurance and detecting, preventing crime and anti-social behaviour and supporting the evening and night time economies. The CCTV system is nearing the end of its useful life, and with the withdrawal of funding by ESCC the Borough has reviewed the options for the future. With small one-off contributions from Sussex Police and ESCC the Council is to invest £360,000 in a state of the art CCTV system relocated to the Town Hall as part of the Contact Centre.

The Borough had acted as the agent for ESCC on local highway matters since 1974 when local government was reorganised and provided a local service for local people, sensitive to the needs of our community. A few years ago ESCC let a new Highways contract and decided to centralise their highway activities. The bulk of the Highways agency agreement was rescinded and staff transferred to ESCC. We managed to retain those elements linked to Parking Enforcement at that stage but with the introduction of on street parking enforcement in Lewes and Eastbourne, ESCC also reviewed the Hastings Parking Agreement. In spite of a valiant battle to retain the service locally ESCC decided to award the role to NSL, the contractor responsible for on street enforcement in Lewes and Eastbourne and terminate the agreement with us.

Our bid to be UK City of Culture 2017 was submitted on April 30th, after getting a good send-off from several hundred pirates outside the town hall , including several councillors. It was a really good and exciting bid, and it may have been this that caused the national bookmakers to slash the odds on a Hastings victory. What was so encouraging was how so many people enthused over the concept of Hastings as a City of Culture, gave up their time to develop the bid, and came up with some very creative and exciting ideas. I do believe that such widespread support for this concept is born out of the belief that culture doesn't always come packaged as a museum, an art gallery, or even as grand opera. It is created by all of us who live here in this Town, or those who merely come as visitors. The impact made on British social history

by the influence of the pier and its many attractions on the community, and the contribution of the railway companies that delivered the masses before the days of the motor car, these too played their part. Let us not forget those many visitors who helped create the "bucket and spade" holiday that so epitomises the typical seaside town, and those of us who created an industry based upon service and entertainment around their needs. All of this shaped a culture, that is real, vibrant, and peculiarly British. It helped frame a bid that looks colourful, attractive, multi-faceted, and well-produced. It is extremely difficult to recall any other local event that has prompted so much enthusiasm and support from the community in talking up our Town. The next stage was a clarification meeting with "Regeneris", the consultancy appointed to assess the respective bids. This took place in London on May 23rd, and we await the outcome of this presentation, with huge interest and some confidence born out of the knowledge that the whole team gave of their best.

In its perpetual drive to deliver all possible benefits to our citizens through a series of interventions, HBC is launching a collective energy switch, known colloquially as "Switched on Hastings". The concept of collective energy switching is quite simple, based upon the fact that whilst energy bills are expensive for everyone, an individual household has little or no power of negotiation. However by negotiating together our collective power gives us the ability obtain a cheaper and fairer deal for us all. Changing energy suppliers is easy. Through the collective switch we will search a wider market for the best deal through an auction process. After the auction's taken place, personalised details of any winning offers are then sent out to individual households so that they can decide if any of the new tariffs are right for them, without any obligation. There's no disruption to their gas and electricity supply if they change suppliers. All they will have to do is give their old supplier a final meter reading so that they may work out your final bill, and give the same information to the new supplier, if they decide to take up the offer. In offering this scheme it is also possible for us to support our green credentials in that a green fuel tariff can be provided as an option to any household. In addition - any scheme that we develop will also provide an opportunity to promote energy efficiency advice and information. And as you know if we can encourage and support householders to make their homes warmer and more fuel efficient, it can have a positive impact on climate change by reducing green house gas emissions from the use of energy in their home. One of the main beneficiaries from such a scheme will be those who are experiencing fuel

poverty, but the drive is for every household to share the benefits. The scheme will go live in the Summer with the first switch taking place in September.

## **Local Issues**

At the beginning of the month I attended the AGM of the Hastings Old Town Resident's Association, held in the Stade Hall. As usual it was a well attended and lively meeting, with the President Amber Rudd MP presiding over the evening's business. The gathering this year was honoured by the presence of Sir Quentin Blake, a great supporter of the story Telling Festival, and a recent recipient of the accolade of knighthood for his "services to illustration". It is perhaps fitting to record that the investiture of knighthood was actually performed by HRH Prince Charles, who set up the Prince's Foundation for Children and the Arts, of which Sir Quentin is also a great supporter. I believe that it is important to record that Sir Quentin also most graciously accepted the vice presidency of HOTRA, which was offered to him on that evening. As the proceedings continued a number of pertinent questions were put to the meeting, ranging from the future design of the boating lake, to some of the more unpleasant episodes that tend to follow several of the Town's annual festivals. Certainly it is my intention to resolve to the general satisfaction of our residents the issues that are within my gift, whilst I will continue to work alongside others to address those that require a multi-agency approach.

You may recall that sometime back I commented on the ongoing problem of shingle accretion. This is the continual build up of shingle on the foreshore, caused by the west to east longshore drift, that will eventually create a gradient so steep that a boat cannot be safely launched. In an attempt to help the fishermen with this problem HBC provided the fishing community with two replacement bulldozers, such that they might keep this wall of shingle within manageable proportions. The plan was to reclaim the money from the

FLAG project (Fishermen's Local Action Group), but this activity continues to be thwarted by the plodding ineptitude of the MMO, the administering organisation for this European funding. Today the threat of a Marine License, basically required by anyone who moves shingle on the foreshore, hangs over the fishing fleet and indeed anyone else who launches a boat from the beach, including the RNLI who has responsibility for our lifeboat. This is surely bureaucracy gone mad when you consider that our fishing fleet has been launched from the beach for the last thousand years.....without a license.

After the long and tortuous journey that was the conversion of the old Clive Vale Hotel into sheltered accommodation, the final piece of this development is about to be added. I have now been reliably informed by ESCC that the long awaited pedestrian refuge, to be sited at the junction of Alfred Road and Old London Road, is scheduled to be put in place in the next couple of weeks. It is awaiting only the clearance that road works at this point will not clash with others in the immediate vicinity. There should be many lessons learnt, by many different agencies, from this particular development. The most important being that what happened here should never be allowed to be repeated in this Town, the whole sorry episode was unacceptable from start to finish.

As you all probably realise the new season of Stade Saturdays is underway with a wide variety of performers from brass bands through to a unique "body circus". The middle Saturday of the month saw Hastings entertained by "Tekameli" A flamenco influenced group from the southern foot of the Pyrenees. They provided superb Catalan music to a large audience gathered on the Stade, whilst on the preceding Friday the Chapman Brothers held an event at the Jerwood Gallery as part of the Museums at Night Festival. Once again an awesome display of the standard of cultural, and thoroughly enjoyable, entertainment that Hastings continues to present as part of its offer as a destination of choice for those of the most discerning taste.

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. For the many of you who have raised the continuing issue of pot holes I append at the end of this report a "question and answer" explanation from ESCC.

*Kind Regards John Hodges*

## Potholes and the general condition of roads – Questions and Answers

Members will be aware that the roads across the county have been severely affected this winter by potholes and winter related problems. This note in the form of Questions & Answers explains the County Council's approach to dealing with pot-holes (and other defects) both in the short term and longer term.

**Q: Why are we plagued with potholes, given the amount of money the County Council has invested?**

A: This is the third successive cold winter and the freeze-thaw action has again taken its toll on those roads that haven't benefited from recent investment and resurfacing. East Sussex is not alone; potholes have developed across the country and are usually a symptom of roads in poor condition and/or poor quality utility reinstatement, allowing cracks to form in the road surface and water ingress. Comfort can be drawn from the fact that potholes are not forming on newly surfaced roads.

**Q: Did the Council react quickly enough and take on sufficient resources?**

A: As soon as it became apparent in early December that pothole numbers were likely to increase we took on additional resources, and since the beginning of January we have employed over three times the usual number of maintenance gangs. But these additional resources come at a cost and we have spent approximately an additional £750,000 from our revenue budget repairing potholes.

**Q: Why has it taken so long to repair all the potholes?**

A: Simply the sheer number. Between the beginning of January and mid-May we have repaired approximately 30,000 potholes, which is unprecedented. Pothole reports are now declining but we will continue with the increased level of resources for the foreseeable future.

**Q: Why is the quality of pothole repairs so variable? What is the difference between a permanent pothole repair and a temporary repair? And why aren't all repairs permanent?**

A: The vast majority of pothole repairs are permanent repairs. A permanent repair is easily identified – it should be saw-cut back to good tarmac; to a regular shape; the surfaces properly prepared and bonded; and filled and compacted with hot tarmac. We have instructed our maintenance contractor and his subcontractors that all repairs should be to this quality. However there are exceptions when it is only possible to carry out temporary repairs, but these should be limited to those situations where it is unsafe to carry out a lengthy permanent repair, and therefore a temporary repair is carried out to ensure the road is safe until such time that a permanent repair can be carried out at night for example, or when additional traffic management can be arranged. The only other occasion when a temporary repair is permitted is where we know we are following up with more extensive patching or resurfacing in the near future.

**Q: What quality control does the County Council employ to ensure the quality of repairs?**

A: Supervisors oversee the work of the repair gangs on a daily basis and each repair is photographed. These photographic records are checked on a

daily basis by Supervisors and Council Officers. Those repairs not meeting County Council standards are repeated at the contractor's expense. On the ground our Highway Stewards are our eyes and ears and they too check on the quality of repairs as they go about their duties.

**Q: Why hasn't the pothole that I reported been repaired?**

A: The timescales for carrying out pothole repairs are defined by the County Council's maintenance policy, which categorises potholes (or defects) according to the size and depth of the pothole, location, and type and speed of road.

Our Highway Stewards use this policy as well as their professional judgment to assign the appropriate category to each defect in accordance with this maintenance policy:

- Category 1.1 – to be repaired within 2 hours
- Category 1.2 – to be repaired within 5 days
- Category 2 – to be repaired before the date of the next inspection (which depends on the classification of road but could be one month, 3, 6 or 12 months).

The timescales described above constitute our statutory defense under Section 58 of the Highways Act that recognises the County Council can only be held liable for third party claims for damages if it can be shown to have been negligent and not responded to a known pothole within these published timescales.

The majority of potholes are repaired within the timescales outlined above, but what is not generally appreciated is that most residential roads are inspected on a six monthly or annual basis and as such we have similar periods of time (6 or 12 months) within which repair minor (Category 2) defects in these locations. Whilst we do endeavor to better these targets, with the sheer number of potholes we are experiencing our ability to better these targets is reduced.

We also have to differentiate between those really deep, dangerous potholes, and those areas of carriageway where the top surface has started to delaminate but remains perfectly safe, warranting a lower priority.

**Q: Why does the Council's contractor only repair one pothole in a specific location and leave others?**

A: Our contractor is instructed to adopt a sensible approach and to repair adjacent potholes, where it is safe for the gang to do so and they have adequate material. The exception is where this approach would significantly delay their daily work schedule, particularly where a gang has a number of Category 1.1 potholes to be filled within two hours. Each maintenance gang has a predetermined daily task list prepared by the Control Hub and usually a corresponding amount of materials for the day (to minimize wastage). If a gang were to stray too far from its prescribed work schedule we run the risk of missing the timescales described above, and/or running out of materials.

**Q: Repairing potholes sounds like a very reactive approach. What else is the County Council doing?**

A: Yes repairing potholes is a reactive process and the County Council recognises the importance of moving away from a reactive service to a more planned approach. This is being achieved in conjunction with the introduction of an Asset Management approach, the creation of an Asset Plan to prioritise maintenance on a county-wide basis, and investment on a whole life cost

basis.

**Q: How much does the County Council invest in Highway Maintenance annually?**

A: Historically the County Council has invested circa £8.0m per annum in road maintenance from its capital budget, but in recognition of the need for additional investment this was increased in 2010/11. Over the past three years the Council has invested £40m in road resurfacing and plans a further £30m over the next two years.

**Q: How big is the East Sussex road network and how much has been resurfaced in the past three years?**

A: The road network in East Sussex is approximately 2000 miles (3000km) in length and in the past three years we have resurfaced approximately 150 miles (250km) of mainly A and B roads. (approximately 8% of the total road network.)

**Q: Has the County Council received any additional funding from the DfT, and what are we doing with it?**

A: Yes the County Council has received £1.5m for this financial year and a further £800,000 promised for next financial year. This money is being used to part-fund a large programme of patching (as distinct from full-width resurfacing). We have completed 20 out of 31 of these schemes identified to date and will finish the remainder of those funded by the DfT grant by the end of June. All of these sites have been advertised as "Funded by a DfT Grant" and details will be posted on the County Council website.

**Q: So what is being done to prevent the formation of potholes next winter?**

A: Quite a bit. As well as carrying out permanent repairs to potholes we have embarked on a programme of larger-scale patching, described in the previous answer. We are investing £4.5m in patching (as distinct from full width resurfacing) across the county and will follow this with an extended programme of surface dressing (tar and chippings) to seal the roads. We envisage our surface dressing programme this year to be approximately £1.5m and plan to surface dress 30 miles (50Km) of road. This will include a good proportion of our C and Unclassified road network. At the same time we will continue with our programme of resurfacing.

**Q: What is being done longer term to improve the condition of our roads?**

A: We are developing an Asset Plan which will enable longer term investment decisions to be made based on better data and knowledge of road condition across the county. Linked to political priorities and agreed outcomes we will then be better informed to determine future investment budgets and maintenance strategies based on whole-life costs.

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