

## WARD REPORT - OLD HASTINGS - JULY 2013

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### **General issues**

The tortuous journey to place the pier in the hands of the preservation group continues with much feverish activity in the background. The latest action moved to Panama where the vesting document was served by hand on a PO Box at a Panamanian bank. This means that once the vesting period of twenty eight days is up ownership can be transferred to the Pier Trust. Already the Trust has taken on its first six employees, a sure sign that the promised benefits to Hastings are beginning to be delivered.

I append a copy of the precis of the Bio-Diversity Review of the Hastings Country Park covering progress over the last ten years.

# **Biodiversity Review 2013 Summary**

Hastings Country Park Nature Reserve is a 345ha local nature reserve. One of the largest in Sussex. The site has national and international conservation designations, such as Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Area of Conservation, due to the presence of biodiversity rich habitats including ancient gill woodland, soft rock undercliff, maritime heathland and semi-natural grassland.

Within the nature reserve nationally declining habitats have been increasing due to the creation and restoration of semi-natural grassland and heathland. Farm bird species such as linnet and yellowhammer have also been increasing as well as bumblebee and solitary bee species. And invertebrate studies have shown the reserve to be rich in biodiversity.

Semi-natural grassland and meadow is a habitat that has been lost in large areas over the country. Within the nature reserve over 31 hectares of flower-rich grassland has been created, and wide flower-rich margins have been seeded around arable fields to add to the 6.4 hectares of grassland that already occurred within the reserve.

This has proven to be of great benefit to many bumblebee and solitary bee species including nationally scarce species such as the brown-banded carder bee and the long-horned bee (below).

Maritime heath land is a globally scarce habitat and was disappearing under dense bracken within Warren Glen. The bracken scraping and grazing by Highland cattle has proved to be hugely successful and the glen is returning back to acid grassland which provides the ideal conditions for heather species to germinate and spread in the future. This is a long process but huge strides have already been made to restore heath and within the reserve. Farmland management has been carried out especially for nationally declining farm birds. The creation of over-winter stubble, wild bird cover crops and feeding stations has seen large increases in wintering linnet, yellowhammer and reed bunting. Four barn owl boxes have been installed within the reserve, which has encouraged barn owls to return to breed within the area.

The wide flower-rich arable margins now support some of the densest populations of foraging bumblebees in the area. To ensure all this nature conservation work achieves the biodiversity objectives set out in the management plan a great deal of biological monitoring work has been carried out including invertebrate assemblage studies, bumblebee surveys, breeding bird & wintering bird surveys, dormouse monitoring, plant & habitat monitoring and a bird ringing project.

None of the nature conservation achievements made would be possible without the commitment of the volunteers, local naturalists and Friends of Hastings Country Park Nature Reserve that have dedicated a great deal of time and effort into improving, monitoring and raising awareness of the reserve and the biodiversity it supports.

*This is a summary of the **Hastings Country Park Nature Reserve Biodiversity Review 2013**, which includes detailed information about the changes to the habitats and species within the nature reserve over the last ten years.*

Southern Water will soon be introducing plans for the installation of water meters into our area as part of a five year programme across the south East. Under the programme, they are installing more than 500,000 water meters in Hampshire, Sussex and Kent by 2015 to help secure water resources for the future. This is alongside tackling leakage and developing new resources. Water resources in the South East are under pressure and our region is classified as one of 'serious water stress' by the Government. They are

introducing metering as households on a water meter tend to use 10 per cent less. Together with the majority of their customers, they also believe that households paying for the water they use, is the fairest way to charge. In addition, it puts their customers in control of their bills. The new meters they are installing are 'intelligent' and are equipped with leak alarms which will help the company, detect leaks on supply pipes and inside properties, as well as on their own mains network.

They plan to install meters in the postcode zones indicated below from September 2013.

Postcode sector	Installations planned from:
TN39 3 (Bexhill)	September 2013
TN38 8 (St Leonards)	September 2013
TN38 0 (Hastings)	September 2013
TN37 6 (St Leonards)	September 2013
TN37 7 (Hastings)	September 2013
TN38 9 (Hastings)	September 2013
TN34 1 (Hastings)	September 2013
TN34 3 (West Hill)	September 2013

### **How the programme works**

Southern Water will contact customers before their meters are fitted. Installation is free and in most cases the meter will be fitted in the public footpath outside a property so there is no need to enter customers' homes. Customers will be provided with lots of written information about their meter and metered bill, as well as easy ways in which they can save water, energy and money. Their installation teams will work on a road-by-road basis and when they are in an area, customers will have the opportunity to talk to Southern Water's advisors directly.

### **Keeping bills affordable**

Using a phased approach, they are switching customers with new meters onto metered charges around three months after their meter is installed. They will be working closely with the water industry regulator, Ofwat, and their customers, and have developed a range of tariffs to give people time to adapt to metered charges and make sure that water bills remain affordable for everyone. Any increase in a customer's bills will be phased in gradually over three years to give people time to adjust to their metered charges and understand how to manage their water use and bills.

I am continually asked what we intend to do about harnessing the massive enthusiasm that accompanied our bid to become City of Culture for 2017. Our first move was to reconvene the symposium that we had previously held at the bid stage. This second symposium which was held once again at the De La Warr Pavilion and was attended by over sixty people, it was a repeat of the original enthusiastically supported event. We need to consider what we can afford to take forward of the elements of city of culture bid and what can be delivered through existing resources from partners and from cultural activists. But for certain the one thing that was not lost was the pure enthusiasm and the willingness to promote Hastings and Rother as the most fantastic epitome of everything that is both cultural and appealing.

### **Local Issues**

As the season of Stade Saturdays progresses, it would appear from all reports that the standard of entertainment just gets better and better. Closing out June we had the brilliant Peter Knight, whose virtuosity was demonstrably stated as being of a far greater breadth than just Steeleye Span. So ably supported by other local talent, Gigspanner produces music that defies labelling, one minute it can find its roots in Africa and then move on to celebrate the Cajun contribution, probably the closest description would be a musical journey around the globe. We were next entertained by the Tiger Lillies, led by the incomparable Martyn Jacques. And yes it did stray into the world of entertainment where the appeal could be described as mature, but their musical repertoire was superbly aligned with Hastings own connection with sailors and the sea. This theme was carried on later in the month with the Hastings Sea Shanty Festival attracting singers from near and far, building on last year's success it will hopefully become an annual event. Not to be outdone the Big Gig Festival provided the opportunity to celebrate the sounds of community music through the talents of over two hundred singers and musicians. The whole event played out on or around the Stade to hugely appreciative audiences and provided them all with the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of music making and music makers as an integral part of the ethos of a community. Long may such traditions and the enjoyment that they bring be sustained as part of the wonderful cultural offer that our Town has to make.

Once again the future of the Isabel Blackman Centre is under the implied threat that review and consultation usually bring. East Sussex County Council took the decision in cabinet to go out to consultation on the IBC together with both Pinehill and Mount Denys, all in the name of cost reduction. In keeping with the similar situation created by the proposed closure of the Ridge Fire Station, I firmly believe that all other avenues of saving should be explored, before front line service closures are even considered. IBC is the last of the Adult Day Care Centres, and allows beyond its considerable list of actual services that simple provision of human companionship to those who eke out a solitary existence, very often as a virtual prisoner confined by their own disabilities. And let us not forget the carers to whom the parallel respite is so precious in a life given over to the attention of others. I do not accept that claims of an alternative service vested in the independent, community and voluntary sector can provide an holistic alternative. It poses too many questions with regards to capacity, affordability, and the simple logistics of where and when it would take place. I am deeply involved in this fight, as the sacrifice of such a facility in the name of austerity goes way beyond the obvious loss to the most vulnerable in the community. It diminishes the offer that Hastings can make to the businesses who will consider this Town for investment, a town without the ability to provide adult social care via a traditional centre is sadly lacking in a universal package of benefits that it can put forward.

I would draw all of your attentions to a potential danger that exists at any time to the innocent walker under the cliffs between Rock a Nore and Ecclesbourne Glen. Bathers and walkers alike should be urged not to ignore the 'Danger' signs at the eastern end of Rock a Nore Road. The dry weather has made the cliffs more susceptible to collapse, and there was a dramatic fall earlier this month.

Another issue that has presented a stumbling block in the development of an improved evening economy for the Town, and especially for our large student population has been the absence of an evening bus service going west. The lack of evening buses from Hastings to Eastbourne is something we have been concerned about for some time and, indeed, this has been raised through

our overview & scrutiny committee and the Quality Bus Partnership. From the first of July Stagecoach have put on two more buses on their '99' route, leaving Hastings for Eastbourne at 20:20 and 20:55, allowing nearly two and a half hours extra time in Hastings for visitors and students alike.

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*