

WARD REPORT - OLD HASTINGS - JANUARY 2014
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General issues

Those of us who live or work here know how much the town has improved over recent years, but unfortunately memories of the 'Costa Del Dole' headlines much-loved by some of the more reactionary press linger on. Hastings Borough Council has therefore been working with key businesses and other organizations in the town – including, of course, the Hastings Observer, who have been involved on developing the plans since the earliest days to help improve the image of the town. Famously Hastings - the biggest and brightest new campaign for a decade. Hastings is a great place to live, work, visit, shop and invest in. We know that, and so does everybody who comes here. But some of the more unfortunate stories which appeared in the national press fifteen or so years ago, and occasionally still, wrongly, repeated today do us no good at all. So we have developed a campaign which we will focus on all of the very many good things there are to do here. We are occasionally accused of looking back in the past, to 1066 and all that. We know we are very forward looking, but cannot deny that, because of the battle we are very famous, indeed the most famous town in the world. What other towns are so well known? We're quirky, too, so we can say we are famously green, not just because of the very sustainable projects that are undertaken here, but also because of Jack in the Green! And we are certainly famously switched-on, not just because we have a thriving cluster of high-tech industries here, but because television was invented here! And the world crazy golf championships prove, if proof was ever needed, that we are famously crazy. And it's not just about Hastings Borough Council. We will be working with private businesses and other organizations such as the college and university to make sure that we give out a clear, positive message about Hastings, and what a famously fantastic place it is. Visit our campaign website www.famouslyhastings.com for more details about how famously well our town is doing.

One of the most depressing statistics to emerge from the recessive pressures of recent years has been the levels of unemployment, and none more so than those that reflect the terrible waste of young lives. After a minimum of twelve years of education, where the dreams of our young people aspire to a chosen career and a respected place in society, it is not an acceptable alternative to be faced with nothing other than a place in the dole queue. Many of the ills of today's society can be laid fairly and squarely at the

lack of employment and opportunity, and no more so than when those deprived of life's chances are the young. If we can provide those opportunities for our children they will develop a shape to their day and a pattern to their life, free from the many adverse diversions and commence the journey that will allow them to realise those aspirations that they have nurtured. Now society has facilitated such an opportunity. A local campaign to encourage businesses to help local young people's employment prospects has reached its target of 1066 pledges. The Own Grown project started in February last year with a bold target of getting 1066 pledges to invest in and help young people into employment during the year. The campaign, led by a partnership including the Observer newspaper group, local councils, business associations, Sussex Coast College Hastings, Jobcentre Plus and other organisations working with young people has now reached its target of 1066 pledges several weeks early. Since the campaign's launch, unemployment among under 25's in the area has dropped by nearly one-third, from 1,265 claimants to 865 claimants. This demonstrates the willingness of employers to take on our local young people, and reflects the work of schools, colleges, and support agencies to help them to be ready willing and able to start work. Nationally, unemployment in this age range went up by 0.2% over the same period. Since the campaign's launch, unemployment among under 25's in the area has dropped by nearly one-third, from 1,265 claimants to 865 claimants. This demonstrates the willingness of employers to take on our local young people, and reflects the work of schools, colleges, and support agencies to help them to be ready willing and able to start work. Young people are very important to the future of Hastings, so it's vital that we make sure they have the right skills to help them into useful, rewarding jobs. That's why the council has been committed to supporting this initiative by providing the day-to-day administration and coordination of 92 employers who have all made pledges. We are delighted that they have enabled Own Grown to hit the challenging target set by the partnership. Business, civic, and leaders from academia have all acclaimed the scheme and the outcomes that it has delivered for young people, and the links that have now been formed between businesses and young people. Own Grown is a classic example of what can be achieved when people commit themselves to working together to address a long-standing problem in Hastings and Rother. It is also believed that Own Grown is the only scheme of its kind in the country, and this has prompted calls from all over England asking how we in Hastings managed it. The partnership aims to build on this success in 2014, by sustaining links between businesses and schools, and supporting employers who can offer work experience and apprenticeships. They also aim

to ensure that training in practical and personal skills, such as confidence and communication that employers need are available to local young people.

For more details about the Own Grown campaign visit

<http://www.owngrown.org.uk/>

I have been asked frequently about works currently being undertaken in the Country Park at the old quarry, and at the site variously known as St George's Chapel or Churchyard, a local description of uncertain provenance. Designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Hastings Country Park and Nature Reserve has some of the most important geological features in the country, specifically the cliffs containing internationally renowned paleo botanical specimens and the rocks within the Quarry at the main entrance. These rock exposures have now largely disappeared under vegetation and scrub and will be cleared at the request of Natural England; the body responsible for designating SSSI's. The essential work to remove excess vegetation from rock faces will take place during January and February by contractors. We will consistently monitor the works to ensure that wildlife is not affected; working at this time of year will avoid disturbing nesting birds. For public safety during the works, the footpath has been diverted. The old route will be opened again when the works are completed, hopefully by mid February. It is recognised that the works will initially look drastic, but by exposing the sandstone rock outcrops, Natural England and Hastings Borough Council will be displaying some of the finest examples of our geological past for all to see.

A nationally important archaeological site on the East Hill at Hastings Country Park is also being damaged by tree roots. St George's Chapel sits on one of the country's top archaeology sites which has been designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument by English Heritage. The trees have been growing on the chapel site over the last 30 years, and now their roots are causing damage to this important location. English Heritage, Natural England, Hastings Borough Council and East Sussex County Council will be working in partnership to clear the Chapel area of the damaging trees and vegetation to protect the archaeological remains. The East Hill contains the extensive remains of an Iron Age Hill Fort, within which are the remains of a medieval chapel and cemetery site known as St George's Chapel, comprising earthworks above ground, as well as possible buried remains. While this work is in progress we are asking Country Park users to be aware of machinery when the clearance teams are at work and to keep dogs under control.

There has been a spectacular rock fall of the cliff face at Rock a Nore, Hastings. This area, which forms part of Hastings Country Park and Nature Reserve is susceptible to landslides as this is a natural and expected process for this type of cliff. However, the excessive rain fall over the last few weeks has saturated the land which together with strong winds and exceptionally high tides has lead to the massive fall in early January. Rock fall is a natural process for these cliffs and although it is very exciting to see this happen we must remind the public not to enter the area. It is extremely dangerous given the current weather conditions. We already advise the public not to enter the area with warning and information signs and a fixed barrier to restrict access but must reiterate the current dangers. We have also installed some additional larger signs following the last large falls at the end of the summer. Visual inspections are carried out daily on the cliffs as part of the Beach Inspector's checks, and this includes ensuring all signage and barriers are in place. In addition, we also visually inspect and photograph this area of cliff as part of our quarterly inspection of coastal defence assets. The agreed coastal protection policy for this stretch of coastline under our current Shoreline Management Plan is 'no active intervention'. In addition, the Country Park's Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) status would also support minimal intervention in the natural erosion process.

With so much emphasis on the East Hill, we really must not forget the other side of the Old Hastings valley, the West Hill with its Norman castle and our avowed intent to maximise its tourism potential. To this end a bid for Heritage Lottery funding has now been submitted, complete with the support of English Heritage. The proposal includes a "green" visitor centre and reception on the Ladies' Parlour, with a bridge across to the castle itself. The bid is for a total of £2.1m, this means that it will go to the national panel of the HLF for adjudication. The amount that we are bidding for comes to 85% of the total cost of the scheme, with HBC funding the rest from our capital programme. We should hear the result in early March – fingers crossed!

Certainly as far as an improving economic outlook for our Town is concerned, nothing could have provided a greater boost than the news that we are almost certain to be granted Assisted Area Status. Together with parts of Rother, this has given our chances of attracting both investment and business into the area a huge boost. With the good work that Sarah Owen has done in China in opening up some opportunities for local high tech companies, and coming on the back of the successful High Vacuum Cluster Fair, we are beginning to have all of the necessary components in place to move this

aspiration into the world of reality. To maximise these valuable opportunities we need to exploit this new found status against a vision driven strategy that pulls together the other essential elements provided by Academia, Sea Space, the enterprise agencies, the Chamber of Commerce, and of course our own public sector. We must put all of this together, alongside the many advantages on both sides of the life/work balance that Hastings already has in abundance, and market an offer that would be difficult to surpass anywhere in the UK. Even BT would appear to have synchronised their delivery of HS Broadband into the area with this tremendous news. Whilst our real time communications in terms of the BHLR, the Baldslow Spur, the Hastings to Ashford rail improvements, and even the chance of enjoying the huge benefits of a second runway at Gatwick could all help to deliver the prize of a sustainable economic future for Hastings.

I have written previously regarding the future changeover of street lighting in Hastings from a predominantly low pressure sodium light source, to one based on the usage of light emitting diodes (LEDs). The driver behind this change is reduction in costs without an accompanying reduction in quality or standards of illumination. To introduce members of the public to this scheme ESCC Lighting Team are holding a public exhibition in Priory Meadow Shopping Centre on Saturday, February 1 from 9am to 5pm, to be followed by a series of local events as each area of Hastings is converted. Old Hastings is one of the earliest conversions and an exhibition for this ward will be held at the Hastings Museum, John's Place, on Saturday March 8th from 09:30 am to 12:30pm. The dates for other wards will be notified subsequently.

Local Issues

With the implementation of the Sea Bathing Water Directive getting ever closer (this is EU Directive 2006/7/EC and concerns the management of bathing water quality) we would like to ask for your help with the Clean Seas Please campaign. There are several ways in which you can help:

- Take a look at the Clean Seas Please website where we have information about the campaign and the areas of concern. www.cleanseasplease.net.
- Sign the Clean Seas Please pledge and ask your family, friends and work colleagues to do the same.
- Follow us on twitter - @cleanseasplease or Facebook – cleanseasplease.
- Publicise the attached newsletter article in any publication that you may be involved with. We would be grateful if you could let us know if you do use it

and where so that we can see where we need to further target our community engagement work.

Many thanks for your help, together we can help achieve the new standard and keep the use of the sea for swimming and other leisure activities open to tourists and residents alike.

People around you are signing up to ensure that Hastings and Bexhill Sea Bathing Water Quality is up to scratch. They feel this is really important for our towns with a tourist economy, fishing traditions and communities who value the sea. Others are linking to our Facebook, liking and sharing, why not take a look:-

Facebook: Clean Seas Please

Twitter: @cleanseasplease

Hastings has become even more famous as news of the 'flash mob' on Friday January 17th was reported around the world. Members of the local community had stripped bare to support Hastings' attempt to be the venue for a major piece of art work by Spencer Tunick, an American photographer, who specialises in organising large scale nude shots. The story of the local 'flash mob' has literally gone around the world, references to it are on websites not just here, but in Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, Malta, America, and even in Kenya. So we really have got some fantastic exposure with this story. It would be even better if we won the competition and got Spencer Tunick here. His photographs are well known around the world, and it would be fantastic if Hastings were to be the location for his next shoot. We know we are the most famous town in the world, and it would be great to add yet another reason for being well known.

"But it really does depend on us winning the competition, so I would urge everybody to go online and vote now, at <http://www.culture24.org.uk/places-to-go/museums-at-night/ART461565-Connect10-Vote-Spencer-Tunick>

For those of you who like to walk across the East Hill and into Ecclesbourne Glen I must warn you of a further landslide at the back of Rocklands caravan park on the track down into the glen. It has rendered the public footpath unusable. The latest bulletin offers the following information :-

Signage has been erected at the following points - The landslip is fairly localised and very unstable.

Coming from East side - barrier at bottom of Ecclesbourne steps beyond cave path.

Top of Steps Ecclesbourne meadow - sign saying "no access to East Hill"

Main path from Ecclesbourne Meadow towards reservoir

Fishponds entrance to Ecclesbourne Glen - sign saying "no access to East Hill"

Western side of steps - top of steps - barrier mesh - "No Access"

Rangers will continue to check that signage is still in place.

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

