

WARD REPORT - OLD HASTINGS - MAY 2014
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General Issues



When I last reported on the pier the programme of relaying the decking was about to commence. This activity is now moving ahead and also moving forwards is the work on the sub-structure. During the last couple of months the first steel trusses have been put in place to the extent of nearing completion on the Parade Extension section. New hardwood joists and decking follow the repair work to the steel. During February some storm damage was suffered at the pier head, this now being assessed and plans put in place for the repairs. This work will be effected before the demolition in the area of the old ballroom commences, and as such will reduce any effect on the full projects timetable.

The cast iron balustrade from one side of the pier has been dismantled and sent away for shot blasting. This will then be repaired and recoated with high quality marine paint giving these sections full protection from the elements for the next fifteen years. The next task on the agenda is the rebuilding and refurbishment of the only remaining building on the pier, currently used as the site office. This building, which was originally one of a pair of screened seating areas for those listening to a band concert, will be converted into a restaurant, where chefs will offer training to young people for a future career in the catering industry. Things are now really beginning to happen.



The other part of the pier programme which has seen an ever increasing level of activity is the Hub. Located at promenade level, in what was part of the White Rock Swimming Baths, the Hub has been the centre for several family orientated activities. The first was based around "chocolate engineering" and proved so successful that a second workshop "cake construction" was provided during the Easter Holiday. Families learnt about the original construction of the pier, and then had a go at building one themselves (and presumably eating it afterwards). Another entertaining activity was provided by a photographer taking stereoscopic images, which when viewed through the appropriate viewer created a very realistic 3D effect. Another activity directed towards the under fives are the "Explorer Sessions", using stories, songs, and games as a medium for exploring Hastings Pier. This event occurs on the first Thursday of every month at the Hub, and the events are not all for youngsters. Other members of the family will find great interest in a forthcoming talk on the musical history of the pier, whilst for everyone's entertainment there will be an opportunity to learn how to play African percussion.



Thanks to funding from Hastings Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) a series of Fish Fairs will take place on the Stade Open Space over the next two years. The first of these is a Summer Fish Fest planned for June 20th - 21st, with everything that you would expect from a Hastings Fish Fair, music, local crafts, food of many descriptions, and of course plenty of locally caught seasonal fish. This festival will be combined with a Stade Saturday's event in the evening that will also feature a firework display. It is then intended that the annual Herring Fair will return on November 1st - 2nd (assuming that the herrings will oblige), with a further Summer Fish Fest in 2015. It is hoped that this series of fairs will become self sustaining, and join the hugely successful all year round programme of events. This fantastic cycle of entertainment is organised by many different local groups and organisations, including Fat Tuesday, Jack-in-

the-Green, Biker's Weekend, Storytelling Festival, International Chess Congress, International Piano Concerto Competition, Classical Composers' Festival, Hastings carnival week, Seafood and Wine Festival, Old Town Week, Annual Guy Fawkes Procession and Bonfire, Classic Car Show, St Leonards Festival, Coastal Currents Arts festival and more. It's what makes Hastings such a special and exciting place to live and to visit!

There is some great news for local fishermen too, and for all such fisheries that ply their ancient trade from the small boats that are used by our own beach launched fleet here in Hastings, and catch fish in a sustainable way. As a result of a recent high court case unused fish quotas have been reallocated to the smaller boats, which means that the Hastings fishery can now catch much more fish, especially cod, for which local fishermen have had very small or zero quotas since 2006. Hopefully we will see the fishery build up to its former status, with more boats and young local people taken on as apprentices to the fishing industry, assuming that the quota rules are not changed yet again !

No doubt most of you have read about the High Court ruling that went against HBC. I thought that you would like to read the council's own take on what we laymen believe to be a most dangerous precedent, when the safety of human life could be balanced against the cost to the public purse by acting in the interests of Health and Safety first. I quote "Hastings Council unfortunately lost its high court battle with Manolete, a scavenger company that buys up interests of liquidated companies in order to pursue actions through the courts, usually against local authorities. In this case, Manolete bought the claim that Stylus Sports (who ran the pier bingo) had for loss of business after the council closed the pier under its emergency powers because it was dangerous, in June 2006, after Ravenclaw failed to carry out essential repairs. The closure was necessary to prevent a major event going ahead on the pier, which engineers said could cause parts of the pier to collapse with major loss of life. Represented by Gaby Hardwicke, a local solicitor, Manolete pursued the compensation claim against the council, as Ravenclaw (who should have been responsible for the compensation) is an untraceable company registered in Panama. Bizarrely, the court has ruled that the council is liable for Stylus Sports' losses, between the time it closed the pier and the time the closure was confirmed by a magistrate in September 2006, the earliest date the council could obtain for the hearing. The high court recognised that the council acted properly, and that the implications of not closing the pier were so

serious that such an action could not have been contemplated. However, they still maintained that the council was liable for compensation. The implications of this case are serious for all councils, meaning that they will no longer be able to close dangerous buildings in an emergency because of potential compensation claims, putting lives potentially at risk. Hastings Council could pursue the case to the Supreme Court, but is already faced with a big bill for its own legal costs, as well as Manolete's costs. The amount of actual compensation to be paid will be worked out through a separate legal process. None of this will affect the Pier Trust or funding for the pier restoration project – that's entirely separate."

The council's local plan is drawing ever closer to completion, with the final consultation on the Development Management Plan (DMP) now having closed. The plan comes in two parts: the DMP and the Planning Strategy. The planning strategy (comprising overall borough-wide policies) was agreed earlier this year, with the DMP (comprising details for specific sites) going to an 'examination in public' held by the planning inspector later this year. The government's planning inspector will then decide whether the plan is 'sound' - if it isn't, it will have to be amended. The DMP will eventually be adopted in 2015. In practice, the government dictates a lot of what can and can't appear in the plan, in effect setting us a target of 3,200 new homes over the life of the plan (a little over 200 a year). The process of creating the plan was also delayed several times, because of changes in government rules. During the process however, the two documents have been out to public consultation for a total of over twelve months, with over 3,000 people making comments. These consultations were advertised in the local paper, on the council's website, and on posters around town. There were also drop-in sessions, and workshop sessions, all of which were very well attended. The process of making comments was complicated, but then it's a very detailed and complicated plan, and a lot of the way the consultation is carried out (and some of the incomprehensible questions respondents have to answer) are dictated to us by the government. This is a classic example of where the government has talked about 'localism' but has actually made the process subject to much stricter centrally-imposed rules.

To promote Noise Action Week 19 – 24 May Hastings Borough Council displayed some of the noise making equipment they have seized over the last few years, at a road show in the town centre on Tuesday 20 May. The council is a key partner of The Community Safety Hub, and its environmental protection team work together with the police and local social landlords like Amicus

Horizon and Orbit on a daily basis to resolve noise issues. Noise can cause disruption and distress to everyone whether it's at home, at work, at study, or just during leisure, and our capacity to make noise is also increasing. Noise affects everyone's quality of life, and the number of noise complaints is increasing. The council is pleased to work closely with the police who support our officers when noise abatement notices are served and noise making equipment such as stereo systems, have to be seized for non compliance. We also work very closely with colleagues at our main social landlords to help their tenants resolve serious neighbour disputes involving noise.

In 2013-14 the council received 1093 noise complaints and over the last three years we have seized equipment on 32 occasions. Most complaints are from domestic sources the majority of which are dealt with informally but we also deal with noise from construction sites, pubs and clubs, and other commercial premises. We urge everybody to consider how the noise they make can affect others, and to be considerate to their neighbours. In terms of the Police There is a rarely a day that goes by without their units being called to deal with a noise dispute. Often these can escalate into unpleasant disputes between neighbours. They work closely with the Environmental Health team to stop this from happening and reduce the impact of these types of incidents. Often it is a case of one party not realising the effect their behaviour is having on the people living around them. More information about Noise Action Week can be found at www.noiseactionweek.org.uk.

You may well remember the appearance of the remarkable Hofesh Shechter dance company at one of the Stade Saturday evenings during 2012, and the impressions that their fantastic skills left with the audience. Now this leading dance choreographer gave a master class in his art to Hastings and Rother education movers and shakers at the Helenswood Academy dance studio during the month. A small audience was mesmerised as Hofesh explained and demonstrated some of the ideas and beliefs that are core to his company's approach to dance, music and life itself. Hofesh was supported by four of his company's dancers who were able to illustrate his points with stunning improvisation as well as performing excerpts from recent successes such as "Political Mother", "Uprising" and "The Art of Not Looking Back". The session was an introductory event prior to a proposed week-long residency by the company in Helenswood and ARK William Parker academies to take place in the autumn of this year, and funded by the Magdalen and Lasher Foundation and Hastings Borough Council. Hopefully this will create a lasting relationship between Hofesh Shechter and Hastings, and the fact that Hofesh is working in Hastings schools will add immeasurably to the quality of life

experience of our students, besides helping them to understand what it takes to be part of a world successful creative business.

Keeping on the cultural theme it is extremely encouraging to report on the work of local artists who have been working with young students in Hastings during the month as part of the Famously Hastings initiative. They have been working on this initiative for some time now, and one of the areas we are keen to promote is Hastings as a great place to study. We've already had successes with the University of Brighton and Sussex Coast College Hastings, and are now working with every year 6 student (10 and 11 years old) as part of their transition from primary school, through the Education Futures Trust here in Hastings. Local artists, led by Ed Boxall, are going into every primary school in town to work with students to produce a single piece of work which incorporates art, maths and writing, all related to 'Famously Hastings'. All students are being given a Famously Hastings stencil to use, and then to keep. This work will go with them to their senior school, and demonstrate to teachers there what level they have reached. It is our intention to ensure that a copy of every piece of work will also be displayed on Hastings seafront later this summer. The Education Futures Trust is itself delighted to be working with Hastings Borough Council this year on this primary to secondary transition project, which aims to support a smooth transfer to secondary school for all year 6 children. The input of the artists, funded by the council, has significantly enriched the opportunities for all of the children and we look forward to seeing their work displayed around the town over the summer.

On a much more sober note I feel that I must comment not only on the tragic events of the fire that occurred at Marine Parade over the Bank Holiday weekend, and the havoc that it caused to the lives of those who were affected, but what has happened since. No doubt the East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, together with the Police and Ambulance Services, will produce a thorough and searching report on the incident and what led up to it, but to me what rose out of the ashes of this tragedy was truly magnificent. How a remarkable community came together, thinking only of those that had lost everything, their homes, their businesses, and how they might provide the pastoral and material support that could provide them with some relief from their trauma. Buckets appeared as if by magic, and emerged from their journeys complete with coins and notes. Donations came from many sources, from private individuals, and from local organisations and businesses, they came from charities, they came from everyone who wanted to help those less fortunate than themselves. Collections continue, as do donations of money,

events are planned in the streets, in the pubs, and in St. Mary in the Castle, prizes for raffles and promises of furniture and clothing have been so generously donated. A group has been formed the "Hastings Old Town Phoenix" (web site hastingsoldtownphoenix.org) who will co-ordinate all of this activity, and through "Facebook", their own website, and any other appropriate medium, will keep you all informed of any planned events, and associated news. From a personal point of view I can only express the great pride that I feel in representing all of these wonderful people as their local councillor, but as I write humility is a more apt description of the sentiments that I foster when I move amongst those who have suffered, and those who have reached out to them in their time of need.

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