

## WARD REPORT OLD HASTINGS - DECEMBER 2014

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

### **General Issues**

#### **Council's New Cultural Development Specialist Set to Raise Profile of Town**

Cultural regeneration is a key priority for Hastings Borough Council and it is hoped that an ambitious events programme marking the 950<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Hastings will raise the profile of the town and signal that Hastings should be seen as one of the South East's major cultural destinations. With 2016 fast approaching the council have appointed Polly Gifford to lead on the strategic cultural development in the town. Polly has been the Director and Chief Executive of Bridport Arts Centre in Dorset since 2010 and for six years prior to that she was Head of Education at De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill. We firmly believe that culture can be the key to improving the image of Hastings. Our City of Culture bid showed the potential within the town and we plan to tap into and build on this further. Polly will be co-ordinating plans for a nationally significant cultural festival to mark the town's celebration of the 950th anniversary of 1066 and will make sure that the maximum benefit is gained for local businesses and local people.

Polly herself explained that she was very pleased to be back in Hastings and looking forward to taking on this challenge. She saw it as a very exciting opportunity to work with our growing creative sector and place Hastings firmly on the cultural map. By using the anniversary of the Battle of Hastings in 2016 to promote our town nationally and internationally, we will be able to develop programmes and new approaches to support the development of creative and cultural businesses with partners across East Sussex. We will also work with schools, colleges and alternative education providers to use culture to develop the confidence, life skills and qualifications required for successful employment and long term career paths for local young people.

To find out how to get involved in 2016 contact Polly Gifford at

[pgifford@hastings.gov.uk](mailto:pgifford@hastings.gov.uk)

## **Water Difference!**

Hastings Council is continuing work to improve the water quality in Alexandra Park which in turn should improve the town's bathing water. Working in partnership with Southern Water and the Environment Agency, the park has seen some big improvements during 2014. New vegetation matting has been put in the streams, providing a trap for silt and bacteria and providing a great habitat for invertebrates such as dragonflies. The ponds at the top of Buckshole reservoir have been treated and the environment improved. As a council we are determined to ensure the water in Alexandra Park is as clean as possible. We know that the water leaving Alexandra Park ends up in the sea, and by cleaning the water in the park, we clean the water on the beach. We are now focusing our attention on pruning trees growing over the ponds to allow more light into the water as well as treating the major ponds and reservoirs with a chalk based substance to help reduce harmful bacteria. The works are scheduled to start by the end of November with the tree works continuing through the winter period.

We are using a natural, environmentally friendly product which is harmless to people and wildlife, including fish. Visitors to the Park may see the ponds looking milky for a short while, but this will be short lived. It will help reduce silt levels; increase oxygenation and improve water quality; improve water clarity by settling suspended waterborne solids; reduce methane production; counteract acidity in the water and the silt; provide essential calcium for plants and wildlife; and increases biodiversity within the water.

Please do contact our Parks Department if you wish to find out more about what we are doing to improve the water in Alexandra Park.

## **Food Safety Course Raises Standards in Hastings**

It is a legal requirement that all food handlers in businesses including restaurants, takeaways, cafes, hotels and food shops etc. are trained or supervised in food safety. The Chinese community leader, with help from Hastings Borough Council's Environmental Health team, organised a one day training session at the end of November for individuals handling or cooking Chinese food. The Chinese style of cooking requires a particular kind of preparation so correct training is essential to ensure that safe and wholesome

food is produced. The level of training achieved by the owner and staff has an impact on the food hygiene rating scores given by the council so we are very pleased to help with this food safety training. The level two course in Food Safety in Catering training was delivered in Mandarin and Cantonese by Susanna Mann a trainer from the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. Candidates were also given information on the new legislation coming next month relating to allergens.

Further information regarding training providers in the Hastings area is available at [www.hastings.gov.uk](http://www.hastings.gov.uk)

### **Survey: Shaping the Future for our Countryside Access**

In East Sussex we have 2,000 miles of rights of way (RoW) and we manage 10 countryside sites covering over 1,166 hectares. If you like to get outside, cycle or walk your dog it is very likely you use them. Likewise, you may represent your community, a business or a special interest group, or work with us as a partner or landowner. We are currently looking at how RoW and countryside sites will be managed in the future, and our first step is to understand the long term need for them. We are contacting you for two reasons: to ask for help in spreading the word about our surveys, and to complete them. There are two surveys, which I append below.

1) Individuals. We are asking people to complete a survey which asks how and why they do or don't use our RoW and countryside sites. It will be useful to get as many replies as possible and I hoped you would be able to advertise the consultation to your colleagues and members. The survey can be found on our consultation hub at [www.eastsussex.gov.uk/haveyoursay](http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/haveyoursay). It will be open from 1<sup>st</sup> December to 20<sup>th</sup> February and is called 'Shaping the future of our countryside access'. Hardcopies can be collected from libraries and tourist information centres if required.

2) Stakeholders. As well as understanding why people do and don't use the paths and sites we would like to hear directly from organisations, partners, businesses and interest groups who have a link with the RoW network and/or our countryside sites. This survey went live on 8<sup>th</sup> December and will take about 10 minutes to complete. It is at the same address and called 'Stakeholder survey – shaping the future of our countryside access'. We will be holding stakeholder engagement

sessions in February, there is section in the survey where you can confirm if you would like to be involved.

If you would like more information on how and why we are developing a long term plan, please visit [www.eastsussex.gov.uk/futurecountrysideaccess](http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/futurecountrysideaccess). This page of our website summarises the project and will be updated as it progresses. It also has a factsheet answering more questions.

### **Hastings Business Enjoys SUCCESS with The Who**

Pioneering local technology company Immersive this week launched a collaboration with The Who, Trinifold Management and Universal Music, using innovative technology to create a 3-D world where fans can experience the music, visuals and landmark moments of the last 50 years in a unique virtual environment. Based in Hastings, Immersive have recently benefited from an award from the Government's Regional Growth Fund via the SUCCESS Creative Fund, administered by Hastings Borough Council, allowing them to quickly grow their business to meet international demand for their services.

The Who Immersive App is currently free to download on iOS and Android, with in app purchases and Premium Virtual Reality experiences using 360 cameras alongside their tour which will be available in subsequent releases.

Ben Dawson, Product Director and Co-founder of Immersive is optimistic for a bright future: "We are grateful for the ongoing support of the SUCCESS fund, which has allowed us to launch a new multi-sensory music format and work with some of the world's leading artists. It has been a great privilege for us to launch our product with a band of such local significance, The Who, as they reach their 50th year."

SUCCESS is all about giving companies like Immersive the extra boost to help them grow, so that they are in a position to get involved in exciting projects like The Who Immersive App now and not a few years down the line. This project is a great example of what doing business in Hastings is all about, a town where cutting edge technology and creative ventures go hand in hand. We look forward to seeing what's next for Immersive as they continue to grow and thrive.

## **Speckled Wood**

The future of Speckled Wood, which lies in the top end of the Ore Valley between Old London Road and what was once Church Street, is a green oasis within an area of dense habitation. It recently featured in the Hearing in Public of the Town's Development Management Plan. This public examination, which will inform the Inspector in deciding the fate of Speckled Wood and other sites within the Borough has been running at Horntye Park since 18<sup>th</sup> November. The area which includes Speckled Wood was discussed in early December. Several local campaigners made the case for retaining much or all of it as public open space while owners of the land argued for development to be allowed. We won't know the Inspector's final decision until the New Year. A wealth of information about the Wood is now available on the Ore Community Land Trust website <http://www.orecommunitylandtrust.org.uk> covering its history, why it is important to save it, and the Trust's plans for its future.

## **Combe Valley Countryside Park**

The council's last cabinet meeting approved a report to set up a community interest company (CIC) to run the Combe Valley Countryside Park. This park takes in a large area of open space on the borders of Hastings and Rother, extending from South Saxon wetlands across to Bexhill and up as far as Crowhurst. It includes the (now closed) Pebsham landfill site, and the existing playing fields north of Bexhill Road.

The CIC will be developed and run by Groundworks Trust, a charity that manages and develops open spaces. There will be a board of directors of the CIC, with representatives from both Hastings Council and Rother Council, and a separate advisory body, to run the park. Much of the land in the park is owned by Hastings Borough Council (including land in Rother) and HBC will retain ownership and ultimate control of the land. The first project will be to set up a small visitor centre, and then to raise awareness of the park and generate interest in, and ideas for its future. This is a tremendous asset for the Town and provides a superb attraction in the west of the Borough, complementing our Country Park at the other end of Hastings. What other Borough can boast such rural attractions at both ends of their Town ?

## **Rocklands Caravan Park**

A report went to the last Cabinet meeting on the long-running saga of Rocklands Caravan Park. This began last winter, when it emerged that a part-built holiday home on the site (close to the country park) did not have proper

planning permission. Other issues around the way the site's licence had been handled, and the unauthorised removal of trees, also came to light. The council commissioned an independent planning expert to look at the case – her report recognised some mistakes made by the council in its planning processes, and made recommendations arising from the independent review of the Rocklands application. Other organisations were criticised too: for example, the Area of Outstanding Natural beauty (AONB) management body, who made entirely different (and contradictory) comments on almost identical planning applications. These were included in the report to cabinet, and were agreed there. The 'Save Ecclesbourne Glen' group also made recommendations, which were addressed in the report.

The mistakes made by the council seem mostly to have occurred because of a failure of process – particular actions not being carried out at the right time, the right checks not being made, or the right people not being consulted. So the council will be setting up fail safe checklists to make sure everything is done at the right time and in the right way when determining planning applications. Planning is a complicated process, governed by many national regulations and government edicts, and involves qualitative considerations by planners as well as straightforward yes/no decisions. Nevertheless, the process can be properly defined and written down. This would make it more transparent and easier for the public to understand what goes on, as well as giving both applicants and the planners themselves reassurance that everything had been done as it should be. After this has settled in, the council will get the Planning Advisory Service in to look at our new systems and review them.

On the Rocklands planning application itself, the council's deadline to the site owners for submitting a revised planning application was in early December. A revised application has now been received and is with the appointed planning consultant who has now completed the evaluation and will submit it for public consultation commencing on January 2nd 2015 for a period of 21 days. A Tree Preservation Order is also being prepared, which will now protect all trees on the site.

### **Seafront Strategy**

The consultation period has now closed for the draft 'refreshed' Seafront Strategy. A large number of responses were received – far more than for most consultations. These varied from quite minor issues (requesting a litter bin in a particular location, for example) to much larger issues, such as future plans for

White Rock Gardens or West Marina. Overall, the tone of the comments was that the council should be 'bolder', and make more dramatic and ambitious plans for the seafront. However, many of the comments, while proposing grand and ambitious schemes, didn't take into account where the funding to achieve them would come from.

A report to finalise the strategy will be going to cabinet in the New Year, responding to the comments made. An action plan will follow, saying exactly what will be done to achieve the strategy. Some of these will be relatively easy to achieve (such as more kiosks on the seafront), others will be longer term (such as regenerating Bottle Alley). For larger schemes and proposals, the council will be looking for community partner groups to work up specific plans and proposals. For White Rock Gardens, we are already talking to the White Rock Trust (a community organisation working to regenerate the area) about working in partnership to put together 'bold' plans for the regeneration of the area. However, the only way such plans (or indeed any plans) will be achieved, in these times of austerity and massive cuts in government funding, is by designing schemes that generate their own funding, possibly through sale of assets or commercial uses. We will keep looking for alternative sources of grant funding, which these days are most likely to come from the EU; UK government grants are likely to be thin on the ground

### **1066 Country Tourism Businesses Crowned at The Beautiful South Awards**

Brighton's iconic Grand Hotel provided the setting for this year's Beautiful South Awards on Thursday 04 December. The event welcomed over 275 industry professionals from the elite visitor experiences across the South and South East of England and recognised their contribution to the tourism industry. Established over 20 years ago, The Beautiful South Awards help drive ambition and raise standards throughout the region rewarding excellence, quality, innovation and customer service.

It was a particularly good evening for 1066 Country businesses, with five star Crowhurst Holiday Park and five star boutique B&B Swan House, Hastings both scooping Gold as top holiday park and top B&B of the year in their respective categories. Winning their third award in this annual event, Rye Tourist Information Centre achieved Silver in the Visitor Information Provider of the Year category and was described by the judges as, "A shining example of what

a Tourist Information Centre should be". Crowhurst Park's Julie Hannah was delighted to win Bronze in the Outstanding Customer Service category.

Brendan McDonagh, co proprietor of Swan House, Hastings said, "We are absolutely ecstatic to have won the Gold Award in the Bed and Breakfast category. Our success has been a real team effort. We won Gold in 2009 and to be recognised again in this way, five years on, has us bursting with pride. The awards ceremony was a fantastic evening, not only for Swan House, but for Hastings and 1066 Country".

This is an excellent achievement and congratulations must go to Swan House. It proves that Hastings is firmly on the map offering first rate accommodation to visitors to the Town. The winners are now invited to champion the South East at Visit England's Tourism Excellence Awards in 2015. Commenting on the awards, Peter Colling, Managing Director of Tourism South East, said, "Every year the Beautiful South Awards are a reminder of the amazing wealth of fantastic tourism businesses and experiences South East of England has to offer. This year the overall standard of entries was higher than ever making it extremely tough for the judges. The winners truly are the best of the best and a match for any in the country. We are now looking forward to our winners taking the spoils at Visit England's National Tourism Excellence Awards.

### **Have Your Say About New Local Nature Reserve Bye Laws**

Hastings Borough Council is reviewing its Nature Reserve Bye Laws. The aim is to provide up to date bye laws based on the Government's model for nature reserves. All seven of the Nature Reserves across the town require separate bye laws. These include Hastings Country Park Nature Reserve, Summerfields Woods, Churchwood Local Nature Reserve, Marline Valley, St Helens Wood, Old Roar Gill and Filsham Nature Reserve.

We would now like to hear your views on this. Please have a look at the consultation documents on the council's website [www.hastings.gov.uk](http://www.hastings.gov.uk) under Current Consultations, Local Nature Reserves Bye Laws and email your responses to [parks@hastings.gov.uk](mailto:parks@hastings.gov.uk), or write to Hastings Borough Council, Parks Department, Aquila House, Breeds Place, East Sussex, TN34 3UY.

All the documents are available to view at the Community Contact Centre at Hastings Town Hall. All responses must be received by Friday, 27 February 2015.

### **Council Celebrates Winning Best Local Authority Run Loos in the UK**

Hastings Borough Council has won 19 'Loo of the Year Awards' including the coveted title of best Local Authority run loos in the UK, beating Highland Council, Ceredigion County Council and Belfast City Council. 1631 entries were received and each had an unannounced visit from an authorised Loo of The Year Awards inspector. They were assessed against 100 judging criteria including signage, décor, fixtures and fittings, and overall standards of cleanliness and management. Every loo received a grading ranging from bronze to platinum and winners that received gold and platinum awards were listed for a number of national awards covering England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands

At a presentation held in Hastings on 16 December, the attendants and cleaning staff of 18 of the town's loos received 4 platinum and 11 gold awards presented by Loo of the Year Awards Managing Director, Mike Bone. HBC was very pleased to attend the awards presentation and see the staff who work so hard rewarded in this way. Winning 19 awards is an excellent achievement. Not only did the council win the best authority run loos in the UK, but the Falaise Fitness Centre also scooped the National Award for Sports and Health Clubs. Well done to everyone!"

### **Local Issues**

#### **Seagull Proof Sacks Help Litter Problems in Old Town**

The council has now supplied many residents in Hastings' Old Town with seagull proof sacks to store and present their rubbish on collection day. Seagulls are a pest on waste collection day as they tear open sacks of rubbish to gorge themselves on the pickings inside. The new peck and rip proof sacks are helping to alleviate the problems of rubbish on the pavements and highway, making the streets cleaner and reducing the risks of other pests. The sturdy seagull proof sacks have been delivered to many streets in the Old Town but are available to others too on weekly waste and recycling collections. If you

would like to take advantage of this service contact the council's waste and recycling team on 01424 451077 or email [recyclingandwaste@hastings.gov.uk](mailto:recyclingandwaste@hastings.gov.uk)

### **Don't Park Here' campaign outside Hastings schools**

Hastings police have been working in collaboration with NSL (parking enforcement agency), Safer Hastings Partnership and East Sussex County Council to tackle parking issues outside selected primary schools. The 'Don't Park Here' campaign began in early December and ended at the Christmas half term break. Local Neighbourhood police officers teamed up with NSL's Civil Enforcement Officers to give advice to drivers about safer parking and where necessary issue penalty tickets to those contravening road traffic laws.

Ten primary schools were selected for this first campaign where problems often arise at school pick up and drop off times, with some parents, guardians and taxi drivers ignoring yellow zig zags and double yellow lines. Sgt Dave Townsend of the Hastings Neighbourhood Police Team said: "During this first phase of the campaign twenty tickets were issued, a further 107 vehicles were moved on and blue badge was confiscated for being misused. The feedback we have received on our social media network has been overwhelming; this is clearly an issue that is close to many people's hearts. Although we only selected ten primary schools, we are hoping to work with NSL again next year to visit other primary schools."

Keith Hayward, NSL manager said: "To work with the support of Hastings police has been a positive experience for both the schools and our Civil Enforcement Officers. We do not claim to have solved the problem, but I hope that this campaign has and will make driver's think twice before parking on the yellow zig zags and double yellow lines outside schools. Ultimately these are there to protect children and make their arrival and departure from school safe. From the feedback we received we have been able to make recommendations to the Highways agency about the placement of some of the road markings outside the schools we visited to improve the situation."

David Weeks of East Sussex County Council said: "We (through NSL) undertake enforcement at schools where we are advised that there is a low compliance to the parking restrictions. There are a great number of schools on the list and resources are limited to be able to provide a presence at each one, given the drop off and pick up times are the same. Our aim is for motorists to take notice and abide by the parking restrictions. There can be no excuse for parking in a dangerous and inconsiderate way outside Schools and we will issue Penalty Charge Notices to those that do."

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*