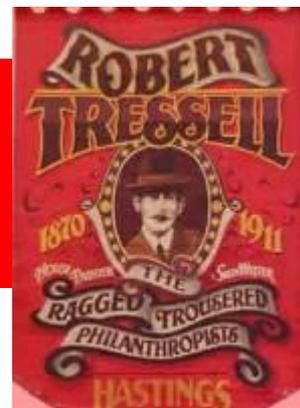


# Tressell Ward councillor's report

from Peter Chowney

6th March 2020



## Rough Sleeping



There have been significant reductions in the number of rough sleepers in Hastings over the past year. Between January 2019 and January 2020 a total of 79 rough sleepers were successfully moved into permanent accommodation, and a further 19 cases at imminent risk of rough sleeping were successfully prevented. The number of rough sleepers on the streets and parks in Hastings in November 2018 was 48. By

November 2019, this had reduced to 24, and to an average of 19 during February. The last count showed just eight rough sleepers. These counts are carried out according to recognised 'best practice', so take the number recorded on the weekly overnight count, but add in other rough sleepers who are known about but weren't included in the count.

This month, Hastings Council was praised by the government for its success in reducing rough sleeping, coming in the top ten local authority areas for reduction in rough sleeping (seventh in the number of rough sleepers, third in the percentage reduction).

Hastings Council has been leading the initiative to reduce rough sleeping across East Sussex, tapping into various funding sources, but primarily through a successful bid for a government grant shared between Hastings and Eastbourne. These grants have now been consolidated into one single grant fund, and Hastings has again been successful in its bid for £1.5m for 2020/21.

The bid includes further funding for additional temporary accommodation for rough sleepers, enhanced outreach services and new landlord incentives to improve access to the private rented sector.

Getting rough sleepers into permanent, secure accommodation takes a lot of work from a lot of different organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors, including mental health treatment, drug and alcohol addiction support, and support to sustain a tenancy. It costs around £10,000 per rough sleeper to get them settled into secure accommodation (not counting the cost of the accommodation). So this has been quite an achievement.

However, the real solution to homelessness is not to continue to throw huge amounts of money at dealing with rough sleeping after it's happened – it's about restoring the funding for the support services for vulnerable people that local authorities used to provide, but no longer do because of funding cuts. Until that's done, rough sleeping will continue to be a problem, and a problem that is expensive to deal with, as well as ruining the lives of those who end up sleeping rough. The government was right to make funding available to deal with the current crisis, but unless the root causes are addressed, the crisis will be still with us.

## Sea Road Caravans

Part of this programme to reduce rough sleepers has been to get the occupants of the caravans in Sea Road into permanent accommodation. Nine caravans have been removed, but considerably more people have been rehoused as the caravans have had serial occupants. The last of the caravan dwellers has now accepted their offer of accommodation, and the last remaining (unoccupied) caravan should be collected by Friday. If that



happens as planned, there will be no caravans there by this weekend. However, we cannot guarantee that more will not appear – East Sussex County Council has refused to install a height barrier to prevent them returning (they have control over that as the highway authority, even though that stretch of road is owned by Hastings Borough Council).

There are caravans elsewhere in Hastings, and indeed throughout East Sussex, on highways, but these are entirely the responsibility of the county council.

## Priory Meadow and Town Centres



Hastings Council own the freehold of Priory Meadow Shopping Centre, with the head lease and responsibility for all the lettings owned by New River Group. However, HBC retains a 10% share of the lease, which provides rental income but also means the Council has to contribute to capital costs at the centre. The Council does work closely with New River though to plan improvements to the centre.

Since Primark opened in Priory Meadow, the centre has been doing very well and bucking national trends. In March 2019 the footfall was up seven percent compared to a national average of down three percent, so almost a 10 percent improvement on the wider UK for March 2019. For the year the centre was up 0.03 percent against a national decline of 2.4 percent.

The number of empty shops is much lower than national and regional averages too. Empty shops there have been let, and are awaiting their new tenants to announce their arrival.

Like all town centres, Hastings Town Centre will need to adapt to changing times. That will mean more leisure uses, more overnight accommodation, and more residential accommodation, above shops. Additional residential and overnight accommodation will boost the evening economy, too. But New River and HBC have plans for that – the Council is converting the unused part above the Millets building (which we own) into residential accommodation, for example. Town centres will change a lot over the next few years, and some will suffer – but our three main town centres (St Leonards, Old Town and Hastings) all seem pretty well-placed to cope, as they can adapt to change and have significantly below average numbers of empty units.

### **Budget 2020/21**



Little more to say about this, apart from that the budget was approved by Full Council last month, pretty much as outlined in the draft. The only changes of substance were retaining the Environment and Natural Resources Manager post for a further year, and continuing to fund the external Hate Crime Co-ordinator post, after Hastings Voluntary Action offered to pay £10,000 towards that. There was also a reduction in savings to the CCTV monitoring budget, to make sure the

equipment could still be fully maintained in a way that allowed it to be monitored by the police.

The task now begins to cover the deficit for the coming year, which amounts to around another million pounds. So more savings, and more income generation, will be necessary.

### **Nature Reserve By-Laws**

The Council meeting in February approved new by-laws for our parks and open spaces. This has been a rather frustrating process, as consultation on the proposed by-laws took place four years ago (there were no objections received). The draft by-laws have to be approved by the government, who have taken four years to do that, following an official complaint lodged by HBC



last year. This means some of the maps used are out-of-date as they don't include some new areas that the Council have added to the nature reserves since the consultation took place. The by-laws are in a fairly tightly prescribed format issued by DEFRA, and adapted for local circumstances. However the Council has to stick with the main substance of the model by-laws to get them approved.

There have been some concerns about the by-laws restricting access to part of the Country Park, but in practice, the new by-laws don't change any existing access arrangements, in that access to designated farmland is restricted to marked footpaths, as it always has been. There have also been claims that the by-laws would impose a £500 fine for picking blackberries. It's true that the standard by-laws operating in almost all nature reserves across the country include a clause that says that it's prohibited to "intentionally remove or displace any tree, shrub plant or part thereof" – which technically probably would include fruit, although that's not the intention if it's done on a relatively minor scale. However, blackberries are an important food for birds and small mammals to help them get through the winter, so it is necessary to make sure picking can be limited if necessary. This general power is essential to protect rare plants and protect food for birds and mammals, maintaining biodiversity in the Country Park.

In the end we should all be aware that nature reserves are set up and maintained to protect the habitats they contain, and maintain species diversity. If that means restricting human access or foraging, then that's something we should accept. Nature reserves are primarily to help the survival of the plants and animals that live there rather than for the entertainment of the people who visit them, and visitors everywhere should respect that. Species extinction is, we now know, a serious problem and is occurring at an alarming rate. There are good arguments to support much more stringent laws to protect species diversity – these by-laws represent minimal restrictions, relative to what might be necessary in the future.

These by-laws were formally adopted by the Council at the Full Council meeting on February 13<sup>th</sup>, following which this was advertised in the local paper, telling people that they had one month to object to the by-laws, to the Secretary of State for the Department for Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), following which the Secretary of State decides whether to approve the by-laws. As the by-laws are adapted from model by-laws supplied by Defra, it's likely that they will be approved.

### **Memorandum of Understanding with Energise Sussex Coast**

Today, Cllr. Maya Evans (HBC cabinet member for Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development) and I met Richard Watson and Julia Hilton from Energise Sussex Coast (ESC) to sign a 'Memorandum of Co-operation' between the Council and ESC.



This states that:

“The Parties will form a collaboration to affect positive change for the benefit of addressing climate change mitigation within Hastings and St Leonards. The partnership will contribute to the implementation of activities to address the Council’s and town’s ambition to be climate neutral by 2030 through the implementation of low carbon energy initiatives.”

Energise Sussex Coast are a Hastings-based community co-operative who install rooftop solar installations using community investment, with an eventual aim of supplying cheaper energy in more deprived communities. You can find out more about them here:

<http://www.energisesussexcoast.co.uk/>

The Council will also be installing rooftop solar arrays on the buildings it owns, as well as potentially on other commercial properties. The MoC commits the two organisations to working with each other to maximise installation of solar arrays through the borough, and not competing for commercial projects.

Hopefully, this collaboration will help to maximise the installation of rooftop solar in Hastings, and will help us achieve our commitment to make Hastings carbon neutral by 2030.

### **Ore Church Solar Array**



One of ESC’s recent projects has been to work with Ore Church to install a solar array on their roof. Unusually for any application, it received 20 comments in support of the proposal, as well as a petition in support. However, the Council’s planning officers were concerned that the solar panels would be too prominent and would change the appearance of this historic building too much. The report consequently went to the Planning Committee with a recommendation to refuse.

The planning committee overturned the recommendation and approved the application, so the installation will go ahead. Several committee members commented that prominent solar panels on a significant building such as this would send a good message to those passing by, that the church and the Council were serious about tackling climate change.

It is true that the Council’s planning policies at the moment are somewhat weighted against solar panels on listed buildings. National planning guidelines are too. We are revising the local plan to take account of more pressing priorities related to tackling climate change, but this revision process takes two years. National rules

need to be revised too. If we're going to have any hope of avoiding catastrophic climate change, then we need to do everything we can to maximise sustainable energy generation, even where that challenges traditional ideas about aesthetics.

## **Climate Change Strategy**

The Council will be publishing its Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan shortly. This will lay out how we'll be implementing the Climate Emergency resolution we adopted last year.



It's taken a while to put it together because we've been assembling an evidence base on how we can best reduce carbon emissions, what the Council can do, and what others will need to do.

The evidence base shows that the Council could, through its own efforts, reduce carbon dioxide emissions in

Hastings by up to 70% by 2030 (including carbon reductions that will happen anyway through planned decarbonisation of the electricity grid). It won't be easy to achieve that though, and will require significant funding that the Council doesn't currently have.

The other 30%, to achieve our target of 100% reduction by 2030, would be down to other public sector organisations and businesses. So we'll be putting together a climate emergency panel of people who, through their positions in the local business community or other public bodies, can help us achieve that.

But it will be down to all of us as individuals too. Hastings Council will be issuing 'lifestyle guidance' on what actions we can all take to reduce our carbon footprint – it will be up to all of us to adapt our behaviour if we're to achieve that 2030 target.

## **Farewell**

As I shall be standing down as Council Leader on 18<sup>th</sup> March, this will be my last report as Council Leader. The new Council Leader, from 18<sup>th</sup>, will be Cllr. Kim Forward. I shall still do a (shorter) report as the Tressell ward councillor, and will remain as a councillor there until the end of my term in 2022.

Thank you all for your support over the last five years. It's been a very difficult time for local government (the worst I have experienced in 40 years working in and around councils). I have enjoyed it, but it's time to move on and let someone else have a go. Kim has been my deputy for the last five years, and she'll be a good leader. So the best of luck to Kim – I'm sure she'll do an excellent job of leading the Council in this vibrant, eccentric, colourful, exciting and beautiful town that we live in!

## Tressell Issues



The Frederick Road 'Road to Nowhere' site is likely to receive planning permission for development soon.

Following a planning pre-application forum last year, developers (Gemselect, a local company) made a number of modifications to address problems of design and layout raised by local people and the planners, and submitted a plan which addressed these issues. The revised plans were

submitted last year and published online, and as only one objection was received, the decision on the application will be made by planning officers under delegated powers. That will happen as soon as legal agreements relating to the development have been finalised. The revised plans are for 52 houses and four flats, with a cycle path running along the bottom edge of the site. This will form part of a 'greenway' link from Frederick Road to Ore Station (eventually). This site was originally part of the proposed 'Millennium Communities' development at the end of the last century – it will be good to see this site finally developed.

Residents of Bishop Avenue have spoken to me about the development taking place on the rest of the former Ore Business Park site. The site has been bought by a new owner, who has told the existing residents that they will not be finishing off the road on the existing part of Bishop Avenue. However, as they sought no new planning permission, they are in effect completing the whole development through the original permission for the whole site, which means they will have to finish off the road (Bishop Avenue) throughout the site and install a small section of cycle path too. We will be keeping an eye on this, and will make sure the Council's planning enforcement team make this clear to the new developers.

We'll be out on the streets for the May local election campaign soon, starting off with a Tressell News delivered to all households introducing Ali Roark, our new Labour candidate. And of course, we'll be doing more of our street-by-street newsletters. You can see the local newsletters we've produced over the last two years in Tressell Ward here:

[www.tressell.org.uk/tressellnews.htm](http://www.tressell.org.uk/tressellnews.htm)

That'll do for now – if you'd like more information on any of this, email me:

[cllr.peter.chowney@hastings.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.peter.chowney@hastings.gov.uk).

We also have a Facebook page at: [www.facebook.com/tressell](http://www.facebook.com/tressell)

And there's the Tressell Councillors' website at:

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