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Special Autumn 2016 Newsletter

Would Hastings win the award for the dirtiest seaside resort ?

With all of the attention that Hastings will receive to celebrate a visitor from 950 years ago it is to be hoped that the streets will be clean. In fact HOTRA members are disappointed to see that the current contractor is not performing in a satisfactory way.

Visit Eastbourne, Bexhill, Battle, Rye, Hythe, Dover or Deal and be impressed by how much cleaner their streets -and the beaches that some have- are kept. Take a town like Deal. It has a long pebble beach, a beach based fishing fleet, a pier and many events to attract visitors. Yet Deal seems to have a street cleaning contractor that manages more effectively.

We know that the Hastings contract should be independently monitored on a regular basis. When HOTRA asked for the most recent report we were told that the Old Town was 100% satisfactory. This raises many questions to which clear answers are elusive.

The steps to the East Hill which carry thousands of visitors every year used to be swept weekly, then it became fortnightly, then monthly. Currently it seems to be not at all. The image for visitors should be so much better.

Recently the main Old Town road sweeper told us that they were about to have serious surgery and would be absent for 12 weeks. As this implied much of the summer we asked about how this work was to be covered. The answer was again elusive. The Old Town streets and seafront used to be swept at least once a day. The current targets are far from clear.

Graffiti

Once a simple phone call to the Town Hall got the problem cleaned off in 1 day. Now the process is complex and very slow. It is frustrating to get effective action.

Hence HOTRA is submitting a Freedom of Information request around the current contract, its daily operation and the competence of the monitoring. We want to understand why other nearby places get better value for their residents.

Hastings Old Town Hall - a huge disappointment

When Hastings Council announced the closure of this special building on the High Street significant efforts were made by the local community to take over its running. The idea of a Community Hub was widely accepted as the best way forward. A Community Hub allows diverse groups and activities to take place at different times on different days of the week. It is a cooperative base which allows mutual support and strengthens community links.

Anne Scott O.H.P.S. Asked H.B.C. to register the building as a Community Asset. This happened in May 2015 and over the next 5 years a number of constraints are placed around this asset. This includes the prevention of sale of the freehold.

Cllr Peter Chowney, Leader of Hastings Council, was approached in February and agreed to allow time for a set of ideas to be put forward by the local community. He was also generous to suggest that there could be a trial period rent free.

From March to July meetings were held every week and concluded that :

- a Charitable Incorporated Organisation would be set up to manage the building in a responsible and regulated way. There would be a set of elected trustees. A membership scheme would be open to groups and individuals.
- The building would be run as a Community Hub with a wide mix of groups operating at different times with exclusive use of their space for their allocated times. The charges would be £10 per hour for the small space downstairs and £15 per hour for the upstairs hall. There would be a scale of charges for special events like fairs and Artists exhibitions.
- A souvenir shop and Visitor Information service would operate on the ground floor. This would also sell Art and Crafts work produced by local artisans on commission. Talks with Judges Postcards took place. They were keen to help. With thousands of Language School students and hundreds of other visitors the demand for this shop is huge.
- The activities to be offered included clubs featuring Dance, Music, visual Arts, Performances plus retro fairs and exhibitions.
- A Business Plan was produced. This showed that by the 4th month the building would reach the income to cover running costs. It would be dependent on volunteer staffing during the Trial period.
- The Business Plan also showed that the rent sought by Hastings Council of £28,000 could not be achieved. *[This is the first time that we are aware of where HBC asked for rent. In the case of the Fishermens Museum, Robsack Centre, Renaissance House and Jackson Hall no rent was required]*
- The mix of activities should serve the whole community and be offered to local people for little or zero charge.
- After school and early evening clubs would aim to cater for local families. For example one idea was to offer 3_D printing and a Chess club at similar times.
- A series of lunch time performances entitled Women of Note would have raised awareness of local women - alive and dead - through performance,

