



**Friday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2016**

**St Peter's Community Centre, Bexhill Old Town**

Speakers:	Nick Claxton	ESCC, Flood Risk Team Manager
	Stewart Drew	Director and Chief Executive, DLWP
	Howard Martin	Bexhill Chamber of Commerce
	Jack Doherty	Chairman, Bexhill Fairtrade Committee
	Luke Blackmore	)
	Maria Goptareva	) Bexhill Youth Council
	Sylvia Sigfusdottir	)

**Nick Claxton, ESCC, Flood Risk Team Manager**

Nick's slides are available on the Forum's web site via this link:

<http://bexhilltownforum.co.uk/meeting-recods/>

- Q. Paul Courtel:** How effective has your involvement been given how many applications you get and how many you are able to take on board?
- A.** It's early days yet as the role is only 10 months old. We currently have two appeals under way as developers are not happy with sustainable drainage techniques. We need 18 to 24 months to know how it's working but its use is being reflected by planners.
- Q. David Gee:** In Mr Pitt's 2007 review, were the risks not identified as being a result of the poor weather of 2013/2014 in the West country?  
Have you the resources to deal with what's needed?
- A.** Pitt's report brought out the whole issue of the fragmentation of the management of flood risk. Pitt recommended one point of contact to take care of all flood issues whereas we currently deal with seven agencies.

In terms of the resources needed, we need two and a half full time equivalent engineers with a sound knowledge of drainage techniques. These are very expensive and also hard to come by – so it is a challenge and we have had to call on consultants to fill in.

**Q. Barbara Echlin:** Given that rainfall has increased in density after the 1° climate increase, are the statutory obligations regarding sustainable drainage sufficient?

**A.** There are concerns, and some technical standards have been simplified. But the answer is no, there is too much risk.

**Q. Lawrence Keeley:** Ditches are not cleared properly, there needs to be legislation for farmers to make sure they clear them and to be sure water drains from roads.

**A.** We work with contractors and there are plans in place: we have identified highway problems and communicated them to the highways people. It is hard to do as much as we would like to with the budget limits and a great amount of roads to deal with. The 2014/2015 events brought the problem home to us.

**Alan Peirce:** Saw ditch clearing under way that morning so it was good to see that it is happening.

**Q. Christine Waller:** When grass verges are cut the cuttings are just left, then when rain comes it blocks the drains. Why are cuttings not picked up?

**A.** We are aware of this. It is complicated as some councils are responsible and need to save costs. This is unfortunately beyond the control of our team but we do raise it, and work with the councils on it.

### **Stewart Drew, Director and Chief Executive, DLWP**

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**Q. Simon Allen:** There is a lack of places for local theatre groups to perform and the DLWP is too expensive. Is there any chance of making it cheaper for community groups?

**A.** We do work with community groups but have to balance with the need to earn money that we can invest back into the Pavilion. We are also a big act venue and nearly reaching capacity. We need to work together to get the right balance - please do come and talk to us.

**Q. Janice Eyers:** Why do you have no plans for showing movies in future?

**A.** Again it is about capacity, and the increasing showing of films elsewhere in the area. The film audience had dropped a lot. National Theatre Live is still successfully shown and we are looking at what else we can do. We will continue with the summer outdoor films that have been very successful and popular.

**Q. Sandra Faulkner:** I've been here for five years and seen DLWP get better. Recently a couple of events had standing only; could the side areas not be seated? Is it the promoters that drive this? Many people can't stand for two hours or more.

**A.** We could try seating in the balcony but have to be careful about keeping the atmosphere, which may be lost if there is a split layout. Yes, sometimes it is the promoters. We do our best to accommodate for the best customer experience.

**Q. Chrissy Foote:** you say there are 395,000 visitors what do you mean by a visitor and how do you categorise them?

**A.** We monitor the flow through the building and count all visits no matter what they come into the building for.

**Q. Hugh La Trobe:** Do you have any plans to be open longer in the evenings in the summer? Will there be any more antiques fairs?

**A.** Opening late is dependent on auditorium usage. It has to be viable and is dependent on filling the auditorium. We are already open later a third of the days in the year and will continue to increase this. We aim to build on this.

**Morris Watson:** Thank you for the presentation. The De La Warr Pavilion is Bexhill's flagship. The anniversary celebrations were very good. The Pavilion should be treasured in the town.

### **Howard Martin, Bexhill Chamber of Commerce Rother District Council has a Town**

Howard's slides will be posted to the Forum's website when they are available.

**Q. Greta Vipond:** Has a store on Bexhill market - Is anything is being actively done to encourage new business into the town centre?

**A.** Definitely, for example there is the new auto place opposite Sainsbury, Wetherspoons are coming, there is hope of a national hotel chain coming – we need to draw other national businesses in as well. The new housing will help with the increase in the population - we want the new people to shop in Bexhill.

**Q. Margaret Von-Speyr:** Two more coffee shops have opened this week in the town but we lack, for example, a china shop. If we have any more coffee shops there won't be any shops available for other businesses to open in.

In the 1980s, there was a conservation order on town centre shops and everything had to be uniform. That seems to be gone now.

**A.** Some councils buy shops and manage what goes in them, this is called zoning. If coffee shops are providing what the town needs, why should they not set up in

town. They stop premises being empty with no business rates coming in. Town centre dynamics are changing through on-line shopping etc and town centres are driven by demand.

The chamber of Commerce are working with Land Securities regarding Ravenside, which does help bring business into the town. We are trying to change its name to Bexhill Retail Park. There is no capacity for big stores in the centre but we are doing all that is possible to bring that sort of thing in and thereby bring people in to shop.

**Q.** Bexhill town centre doesn't compare with others

**A.** For example Hastings old town took years of development such as pedestrianisation to get where it is now. St Leonards is another good example - they got a Michelin star restaurant and people came flooding in - we need this sort of publicity here.

**Q.** **Alan Peirce:** how do the Chamber get information regarding what people do need and how it should be acted on?

**A.** We seek consumer viewpoints but do need to be able to gather more. We would welcome suggestions on how to do this.

**Stewart Drew:** A lot of people are working hard to make these changes happen. For example, we need a hotel that will encourage visitors to come to the Pavilion, stay the night and then spend in the town the next day.

**Q.** **Lucy Marlow:** Does manage to buy nice things in Bexhill and would like to encourage people to go and try the new shops. However, there are too many coffee shops and they need to be stopped or they will stop good shops coming in. What has happened to the old conservation order has it gone?

**A.** What is the town centre for? We need people to say what it's for but if coffee shops are what's wanted why should the council intervene and say no, do something else? Town centre dynamics are changing throughout the country and town centres may become places of social engagement - it has to be driven by demand.

If people are concerned they should raise their concerns with the local council. Howard was unable to answer regarding conservation.

**Q.** **Greta Vipond:** Has anybody asked Mary Portis to come in?

**A.** She did come five years ago and that led to some funding for the town centre.

**Q.** **Gillian Merton:** Has any decision been made about decriminalisation of parking?

**A.** No it has not.

- Q. Hugh La Trobe:** There are twenty two charity shops in the town – can anyone rent them?
- A.** The bigger charities have five year leases but small charities have shorter leases so those are more likely to come available.
- Q. We did not catch the questioner's name:** Can we have more rubbish bins around Bexhill to reduce the rubbish that flies around?
- A.** Please ask the local council.

**Jack Doherty, Chairman, Bexhill Fairtrade Committee**

Thank you for wonderful opportunity to address Bexhill Forum especially as Bexhill is a Fairtrade Town and we are about to have our national Fairtrade Fortnight, starting on February 29th.

I am a member of a group of local volunteers, set up in 2006 while Councilor Joy Hughes was Mayor, to campaign to raise awareness of Fairtrade throughout the community of Bexhill, and achieve Fairtrade Town status. What does this involve? Council support is necessary and RDC passed a very strong policy resolution to lead support for Fairtrade in word and action. Fairtrade products such as tea, coffee, sugar etc are thus used for hospitality by the council. On a pro rata basis for the population of 42,500 we require to have a number of cafes and restaurants serving at least two ranges of Fairtrade products, and a number of retail outlets, shops, selling at least four ranges of Fairtrade products. There must be a proportionate number of businesses and organisations, eg accountants, solicitors, scouts, care homes, B&Bs, horticultural groups, WI, etc, who use Fairtrade tea and coffee, and wo promote Fairtrade where appropriate. A proportionate number of faith groups, churches and schools must work towards developing some Fairtrade activity and use Fairtrade products where possible. As well, there must be a steering group/committee to coordinate these and use publicity, by activities, to raise awareness and further the dissemination of Fairtrade principles and practice in the town.

Fairtrade Town status was achieved and presented to the town in 2007 and every two years the town has to produce a plan to further develop awareness and uptake. The committee are very grateful to the many sections of life in our community who use the Fairtrade lens to think globally and act locally.

The question is often asked "What is a Fairtrade food or object?" 86% of the population recognise the Fairtrade logo on objects and have some idea. It means that the farmer gets a fair minimum price for the product, no child labour is involved, proper safety equipment and conditions must apply, the environment must be protected sustainably. Then, most importantly, there is a sum of money, the "premium", proportionate to the amount sold, returned to the group "cooperative" of farmers who then have to vote, including women, on how the money is spent – very empowering and novel in some

cultures. The most voted on are classrooms, day clinic, a village well, a road to the village/town market etc. For example, Cadbury UK, dealing with Ghana farmers since 2009, has caused twenty one schools and two health clinics to be built, and 23,000 people in communities now benefit from solar panels and lanterns (no national grid!) Last year, 2015, sales of Fairtrade cups of coffee at BP service stations generated £98,000. A premium which helped a number of social and environmental projects in the coffee cooperative, eg farming equipment, quality control programmes etc.

No wonder Alan Duncan said that Fairtrade is a robust and strong economic model which works!

A bag of Fairtrade rice from poor Malawi is a passport to an education and a bright future for the farmers' children where secondary education is not free.

A Fairtrade cotton shirt or pants stops farmers in India from committing suicide where the rate of suicides of unfair priced cotton causes a suicide every 32 minutes (140,000 last year!)

A terrible irony is that children as young as five work ten hour days in the cotton fields to supply cotton to make cheap school uniforms for us here in the UK! What a difference it would make if each school in Bexhill purchased at least one item of school uniform which is fairly traded! Please google Kool Skools to see what can be achieved.

The big theme for Fairtrade breakfast this year is "Sit down for breakfast and Stand up for farmers" on the principle of what Martin Luther King said that, by the time you have finished your breakfast, half the world has prepared it for you! Why are 800 million people starving each night going to bed? This is man made!

About 15 cafes in Bexhill Fairtrade Town are offering some breakfast fairly traded items like tea, coffee, sugar, biscuit, wafer to deal fairly with the farmer. Each participant customer can sign a form to be entered into a free draw for a bottle of Fairtrade wine or box of chocolates on the 17th March.

There is to be a special Fairtrade round of questions in No48 on Tuesday night, the 8th March.

A number of churches and schools are having Fairtrade assemblies and breakfasts – is yours?

And we are having our 9th annual Bexhill Fairtrade Ethical and Recycled Fashion Show in Bexhill College on Thursday 10th March with among other ideas, a trip Around the World in eight Countries led by Barbara Wilson from Brighton who works and collaborates with the poor producers in Nepal, Guatemala, India, Bangladesh etc and will be showing stunning and desirable garments and accessories from Lovethatstuff; Nomads and Bazaar will also be modelled.

The main and simple message of Fairtrade is that you can make a difference just by selecting and asking for the fair products in shops, cafes, B&Bs, workplace, etc. It is not charity, it is justice. Unfortunately, if we don't TRADE with the producers justly we end up paying for AID. Choose change! Weekly, not only for a fortnight.

**Q. Colin Brookes:** Do other countries buy Fairtrade goods in bulk?

**A.** Fairtrade was founded twenty years ago here, but has been longer elsewhere so, yes

### **Luke Blackmore, Maria Goptareva, Sylvia Sigfusdottir, Bexhill Youth Council**

Much of our work over the years has been to campaign on behalf of young people and from time to time we carry out a canvass of their views and pass this on to Rother. But we also take up issues which can affect all ages.

Our new project is on improving disability access around Bexhill by trying to get some roads to have more drop curbs to help people with prams, wheelchairs etc. and to have traffic light timing for them to be able to safely get across the road. We have new members from St Mary's school, one of whom is in a wheelchair and is keenly concerned about the need for drop down kerbs. To help us with this project we have had a talk from Mr Brian Banks, an officer from East Sussex County Council, and discussed with him possible ways of tackling this issue and improving the roads in Bexhill.

Our previous project was about litter in which we aimed to make Bexhill a cleaner place. We looked at places where there is a problem such as Turkey Road, Gunters Lane, the bottom of Galley Hill and the bridge across the A259 leading on to Hastings Road. Our aim is to meet up with Rother to report on our findings and try to get them to provide more bins to make Bexhill cleaner.

We also support Bexhill Environmental Group with the beach cleaning they carry out during the winter months when it wouldn't otherwise be done and at the moment are considering taking part in their Clean for the Queen project.

During the summer Bexhill Youth Council takes part in Family Fun Day in Egerton Park which last year included supervising a bouncy castle for little children.

I hope some of you will have read our road safety questionnaire which we handed out as you came in and have been able to fill in the answers. There are only eight questions and it is a yes/no answer so it won't take many minutes. We will be grateful for your help and will be standing by the door to take completed forms. Thank you.

## **Updates**

After such a busy agenda we ran out of time and so were unable to give updates on this occasion. The prepared updates have, instead, been added here:

### **Next forum**

At a previous forum a good deal of concern was raised by members about schools and the increasing demand for places that will come with the new housing. I am pleased therefore to be able to say that at our next forum someone from the East Sussex County Council Children's Services Department will be coming to talk about school place allocation. That will be on Tuesday 10 May at St John's.

We are very pleased that members are increasingly contacting us about subjects to be looked into – some of tonight's programme came directly from such messages and we hope that more will be identified this way as well. We have already had an enquiry about the future of our police station – we will be investigating this and addressing it in April if there is any news to share.

### **Wetherspoons**

You will recall that Wetherspoons were expecting to start work in Western Road in January. We have now heard from them that there is a delay and it will be starting later in the year – we will let you know when we hear something more definite. In the meantime, we are also seeking an update from them about improving the appearance of the boarded up shops in Western Road, and will also let you know when we have more news about that.

### **East Parade**

You will recall that there was a public consultation a couple of months ago regarding the East Parade. This was part of the preparation of an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant to pay for the enhancement of the East Parade.

The aim is to restore the listed structures and balustrading and to improve the landscape setting, as well as engaging the community to enjoy its benefits to the full. The application will be submitted next week but will, as these things always do, take some months to reach a result. And, if it is successful, then it is going to take until 2018 to complete.

The important message to convey here is that this is a project that will be totally sympathetic to the heritage of the area, and that will benefit from lessons learnt on the previous West Parade project.

If sufficient progress has been made by then, we will ask for a presentation of the project to be given at the June forum. In the meantime, you can keep up to date through the East Parade Heritage Project website at [www.rother.gov.uk/eastparadeheritageproject](http://www.rother.gov.uk/eastparadeheritageproject).

### **Seagulls**

At the November meeting, after the update regarding seagull-proof litter bags for the town centre, there were some supplementary questions about litter in places such as the station. Rother have advised that they are not aware of there being a major problem that needs addressing over this and so nothing is planned. If anyone does have concerns about this, we would suggest that you contact the council directly – that way they will be able to gather evidence and know how great the problem is.

### **Greenways for the link road**

We have been advised by East Sussex Highways that the work on the greenways - that will be the completion of the link road - is to be started in May, when the ground will have had time to drain.

### **Survey**

We are very pleased to be able to report very positive feedback in response to our recent survey with nearly 75% of responses being favourable about what the forum does and how it does it. Thank you for that vote of confidence.

We will be discussing the points that proved least favourable at the next committee meeting and considering what can be done to address them

**Before closing a final question was received from:** Lorna Extence asked what is being done to include those who do not have internet access when Forum communications are sent out.

Theresa Stanbridge advised that the committee had written to everyone on the contact list who had not supplied an email address, including a stamped, addressed reply envelope, to establish their preferences. Six people had requested that they continue to receive paper communications and so they are now contacted through the mail.

**Date of next meeting: The next forum will be on Tuesday 10 May at St John's, corner of London Road and Victoria Road.**