



**Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2015**

**St John's, London Road**

Speakers:	Mr Tim Hickling	Head of Planning, Rother District Council
	Cllr Simon Elford	Rother District Council
	Ms Jo Golding	Area Manager, JD Wetherspoons
Guest:	Ms Becky Dinckley	Hastings Manager, JD Wetherspoons

**Tim Hickling: Rother District Council - Planning**

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

<https://bexhilltownforum.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/planning-presentation-3-november-2015.pdf>

- Q. Simon Read:** The Core Strategy in the new Local Plan is now being used – is it complete enough yet to be effective?
- A.** Some detail from the old plan is still in use, otherwise, yes, the Core Strategy is OK.
- Q. Lorna Extence:** Why is employment being put on green belt/forest land? Why are education people not involved at an earlier stage of planning?
- A.** The plans are still only at proposal stage – when they are examined all aspects, including ecology, will be investigated. Landscape protection is a part of what is considered.

The County Council – who are responsible for education – are involved throughout the process.

- Q. Barbara Echlin:** Are concerns related to climate change taken into account at this stage?
- A.** These are addressed under the sustainable development principle that is at the heart of planning. Each builder takes their own approach eg some will install solar panels.
- Q. Unfortunately we did not catch this speaker's name:** Is it possible for local areas not to accept national demands? Do only buyers of new builds contribute to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)?
- A.** All areas are required to accept their part of national demands. Section 106 is still in place as well as CIL – both are funded through new developments.
- Q. Doug Stevenson:** Who will fill the funding shortfall gap of £49m?
- A.** This will come through CIL, which is based on purchasers.

### **Jo Golding: Area Manager JD Wetherspoons – A new Pub/Restaurant for Bexhill**

#### About JD Wetherspoon

- Opened first pub in Muswell Hill in 1979, by Tim Martin (current chairman) who at the time was a law graduate.
- Named the company after JD Boss Hogg from the Dukes of Hazard and Wetherspoon after a teacher who couldn't control the class and said he wouldn't make anything of himself.
- Currently have 984 pubs throughout the England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and now five sites in the Republic of Ireland.
- Mission statement of the company – to be the best pub company for the community with fantastic standards and great value for money.
- Now operating hotels, Wetherspoon pubs (with no music) and Lloyds which have a music offering in several pubs.

#### Why Bexhill?

- Looked at area infrastructure, affluence, competitors, demographics, future planning of the town, population.
- Have looked and researched in the town for the last five years.
- Now have site which will be called Picture Playhouse. This is the old cinema site and two adjoining shops.
- This will be a 20 week development programme once we go on site, we have no dates yet.

#### What the pub will be

- Community pub – focusing on the needs of the community, we want to work with you.
- Will have an experienced management team but will create up to 50/60 jobs for local people which will be a mixture of bar and kitchen, and full and part time.

- 50/50 food/wet mix but will focus on food, real ale, coffee, and will be a place for everyone.
- 5000 square foot plus 2000 square foot roof garden. Opening times and closing times will be advised on opening.
- Aim to work in partnership with the community and be part of the town.
- Run local and national beer festival and work in conjunction with Camera to gain locale accreditation and aim to get into the good beer guide.
- Run several food clubs throughout the week which offer good value for money.

**Q. Maureen Shield:** How do you plan to deal with the issues that will arise from limited parking space and the one-way street? What impact do you expect to have on other food outlets in the area?

**A.** It is Wetherspoons' normal experience to have no extra parking provision and no problems have yet arisen from this. In our experience other outlets have benefitted from the trade that Wetherspoons attracts.

**Q. Richard Sage:** Will the sixty jobs that you create be part-time or full-time? Will any be zero-hours contracts?

**A.** No zero-hours contracts are envisaged and the jobs will probably be half full-time and half part-time.

**Q. Simon Read:** As the premises were formerly a cinema, would it be possible to keep a small cinema within the building?

**A.** It is doubtful there would be sufficient space for a small cinema. 5000 square feet sounds spacious but it is soon used up with kitchens, storage etc. However some of the original seating will be kept and there may be a possibility to have a small screen. The suggestion will be forwarded to the development team.

**Q. Michael Bannister:** How do you plan to manage when trades vehicles want to use the street to make deliveries?

**A.** We aim to have deliveries made outside of busy hours – we will make every effort to keep disruption to a minimum.

**Q. Howard Martin:** The Chamber of Commerce welcomes Wetherspoons and their investment in the town.

How do you propose to keep noise down from the roof garden after 9pm?

**A.** We do not want to upset anyone and will close earlier if it proves a problem. We will monitor noise levels and make changes if needed.

**Q. Paul Courtel:** What provision will you make to prevent people making a noise when they leave at night?

**A.** Wetherspoons maintain rules and policies to ensure people leave in a quiet manner, and the management team will enforce them. We do not have much trade between midnight and 1:00am, in fact most business is before 11pm and focused on earlier in the day. There will be a list of taxi numbers available and

signs requesting quiet departure from the venue. It should be noted though that we are not able to be responsible for people's behaviour once they have moved away from the premises.

- Q. Christine Byrne:** Sorry to hear that it will take so long to complete the conversion of the premises as the current boarded up state is blighting the street.
- A.** Will speak with the development team to have it improved.
- Q. Maurice Watson:** As Mayor of Bexhill I would like to welcome Wetherspoons to our town.

### **Cllr Simon Elford: Rother District Council – Town Centre Strategy**

Rother District Council has a Town Centre Steering Group made up of Rother and County Councillors and officers, as well as Town Team representation. They have, over the last eight years, been working on improvements in the town and have recently completed the Marina improvement works. There has also been lots of work with the Town Team improving toilets at Devonshire Square, working with landlords to tidy up empty shopfronts and, most recently, installation of the new map boards and finger posts around the town.

The main task undertaken by the Steering Group has been the completion of the Town Centre Strategy, a blueprint for regeneration in the town, which is available to all on the Rother District Website <http://www.rother.gov.uk/article/8023/Town-Centre-Strategy>. With the releasing of this document the terms of reference for the steering group have been fulfilled and, after the elections this year, the current steering group was disbanded and a new Town Centre Steering Group was established. It has new members and new terms of reference giving the group clear instructions and powers to start the regeneration of the town centre, as laid out in the Town Centre Strategy, and to bring forward plans and funding for projects. With this in mind the new committee is made up of representation from Rother and County Councils, The Town Team, The Chamber of Commerce, local businesses and LOCATE East Sussex (who are experienced in working on big capital projects, and have connections with business and funders).

There has also been some early work started by the Town Team looking at regeneration within the town centre, and seeing if by bringing some key players together there can be a joined up approach rather than lots of groups all going in different directions, this group has only had a few meetings so far and it all looks promising with businesses, Rother Council and local groups attending.

These are early days for both these committees but it's good to get everyone together and it's clear from the offset that there is a great desire to start improving the town centre and taking advantage of these exciting times, more houses, more people, more events and greatly improved tourist numbers, and big business starting to look at investing in Bexhill.

The next step is to start making plans and identifying funding sources as well as looking to consultation with business and residents and I would hope that the Bexhill Forum will be a key player in any consultation.

**Q. Unfortunately we did not catch this speaker's name:** Do you have a strategy for parking enforcement?

**A.** Nothing is planned at present. The police have said that they will not enforce parking regulations (due to resourcing priorities). ESCC will only make any changes in conjunction with Wealden. However as regeneration progresses it is likely to come, and to involve payment for on-street parking.

**Q. Christine Bayliss:** You do not mention residents in Bexhill in relation to the Town Centre Strategy. How will you get the residents involved in the decisions?

**A.** We will discuss with residents. The current East Parade consultation has had positive feedback. We currently need to develop more detail to be able to consult properly.

**Q. Roger Dann:** A lot of money has been spent on the West Parade and there's now a lot of talk about the East Parade – what about the bit in the middle?

**A.** Although it is a bit shabby there are no plans for that section at present – it is privately owned and so a different challenge.

**Q. Catherine Larkin:** Have you considered using the site of the former Grand (previously Granville) Hotel for a car park?

**A.** That site is privately owned and already has planning permission for flats to be built. There are other potential sites under consideration though nothing has been settled yet.

**Q. Jackie Bialeska:** There was a fact finding trip to London recently to see what could be achieved with street furniture etc. Hillary Randall of the Town Team is providing an exhibition of the findings on the 17th and 18th November 2015, all day, at the De La Warr pavilion.

**Q. Paul Courtel:** Are you planning to have a coordinator for this project?

**A.** This will be considered as plans come on line.

**Q. Simon Read:** Since we have no town council have you considered involving the Town Forum in the steering group?

**A.** We have kept the core of the steering group small to help things move forward. When the new chairman is in place he/she will continue to engage with the Town Forum.

- Q. Lorna Extence:** Reinforced the value of involving the Town Forum to ensure constant feedback.
- A.** There are many groups in the town that may wish to be involved – to work with them all would be unwieldy. It is time now to stop talking and start to move things forward.

## **Updates (Theresa Stanbridge)**

### **High Speed Rail Proposal:**

From a presentation in October this is the progress of the High Speed Rail link proposal. We have to emphasise that none of us is involved in this project and so are not in a position to provide background information and can only pass on the information we acquired at the presentation.

On May 22nd we heard from Ray Chapman about the proposal for a high speed rail link to Bexhill that would connect us directly onto the high speed line into London and so reduce the time between here and London by 35 minutes – it would become a journey of just 78 minutes instead of the current fastest of 113 minutes.

I am sure that most of us feared at that stage that this would be only a pipe dream but there has in fact been excellent progress made and far from being a pipe dream it is still a realistic hope.

On October 9th the next major stage was achieved when the business and economic case for this service was formally launched.

The proposal is competing with numerous others from all over the country for funding from Westminster but it seems that ours is a very strong case that stands a very good chance of success.

The key benefits, apart from the faster journey times, that have already been identified are:

- Increased business investment and growth in Bexhill and Hastings with the improved image and perception of the area as a business location.
- Increased attractiveness of Rother and Hastings districts as places to work and live.
- Supercharge of the local economy, building upon existing regeneration successes.

- Over 200 jobs created in the local visitor economy with up to £7.6 million per year to the area.
- £19 million of benefit and 425 jobs in regeneration and economic benefits by 2028.
- £354 million of benefit to the local area by 2044.
- Contribution of £123.7 million to the national economy – noting that any case that will win Westminster money will have to have national benefits as well as local ones.

The creation of this service would involve catching a train from Bexhill that would travel directly to London via Ashford, switching onto the high speed track at Ashford.

The next stage will be the delivery of Network Rail's report, which will identify exactly what the construction of the connection will involve and what it will cost. It and the business and economic case will then be submitted to Westminster and funding will be requested.

Clearly this is a major project that will take years to deliver, assuming funding for it is agreed. But we are off to a promising start and, it seems, have reason to hope that it will be delivered and Bexhill will be able to reap great benefits from it.

A scanned copy of the report is available via our website at <https://bexhilltownforum.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/high-speed-rail-economic-case.pdf> so that you may see greater detail on how these benefits were calculated.

### **Seagulls and litter:**

In October, a question was raised about the mess created by seagulls breaking into plastic bags of rubbish that are put out overnight in the centre of town. We took this question to the Council and I can now advise that:

A trial of seagull-proof sacks had already been undertaken. About 90 sacks were trialled at the seaward end of Sackville Road, on the western side, as this was one of the areas identified as the worst affected. This led to an immediate improvement and gained the street sweepers a good hour first thing in the mornings due to not having to clear up the scattered debris from seagulls. Further stocks of seagull-proof sacks have now been ordered, and the plan is to put them

into use in St Leonard's Road, Devonshire Road and Western Road as soon as they are available.

The bags will be rolled out only in the central areas where the need has been identified. There is no firm timescale yet for the roll out as the Council are waiting for confirmation of when a full, regular, supply of the bags will be available.

Other areas are not included at present - landlords of flats are under a legal obligation to ensure suitable refuse facilities are available to tenants.

Once further progress is made on the roll out we will see how effective it is and, if further needs are then evident, we will take it up with Rother again.

**Q. Lorna Extence:** They also attack the bins at the station. Is there a plan for that area? Can we ask the railways to change their bins as well?

**Q. Colin Brooks:** What about the litter bins that are regularly attacked by gulls?

**Q. Christine Bayliss:** Who will pay for these bags? These are important aspects of Bexhill's regeneration.

**A.** My understanding is that the bags will be supplied by the council. We will raise all points and report back.

### **Questions from last meeting:**

Attendees received a handout listing the questions that were put on slips at the end of the 2 October evening, with answers that we have secured. (A copy is also available via the Forum's website at

<https://bexhilltownforum.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/2-october-questions-answered.pdf>. We hope these are useful but please remember that you can send us further questions, queries and comments using the Forum's website, [bexhilltownforum.co.uk](http://bexhilltownforum.co.uk) or directly to the Forum's email address which is [bexhilltownforum@gmail.com](mailto:bexhilltownforum@gmail.com).

Please let us have your comments and questions – we will look into them and get back to you, either directly or at the next meeting – or both!

**Date of next meeting: We expect to hold the next meeting in February 2016 and will confirm details as soon as possible.**