

HASTINGS & ST. LEONARDS SOCIETY
Promoting Our Heritage and Civic Pride

Website: www.hastingsandstleonardssociety.org.uk
Secretary's e-mail: hstlsoc@gmail.com

Notes from Open Meeting, Monday 25 February 2019, 6 pm start, at White Rock Hotel.

Meeting chaired by Dr. Deborah Madden (Chair, H & St. L Society)

Attendance: 32

1. Colin Booth: Presentation on his 'Diving Tower' project

Colin's intention is to:

i) Commission a life-size, 12 metre high, concrete and LED rendition of the iconic diving tower, once the centrepiece of Sidney Little's celebrated 1930s Hastings & St Leonards Bathing Pool - in its day, the largest Lido in Europe.

ii) To re-energise a geographically unique, though long-neglected coastal site; kick-starting its return as a vibrant public space, with a meaningful sense of community engagement and ownership.

iii) To engage the broader community of the town in both remembering the past, celebrating the present and looking forward to the future. Residents will be invited to contribute old photographs and films of the old bathing pool for an exhibition.

(iv) Siting: On the foreshore, directly opposite the original site of the Old Bathing Pool, marking a new destination point for walkers, beach users and cyclists along existing routes. The diving tower will make a strong visual and conceptual link with the celebrated Hastings Pier to the east and Modernist icon, De La Warr Pavilion, 4 miles to the west. At night, it will be a glowing beacon for fishing boats and cargo ships in the Channel and planes on the Gatwick flight path.

The artist, Colin Booth, has had a studio on the site for over 20 years. In 1996 he set up Electro Studios and *esps* (Electro Studios Project Space) on Seaside Road, which directly overlook the site.

Comments:

Colin's proposal was well met, especially as the former bathing pool site is considered a valuable open green space by local residents, and it has been announced that HBC has given the go-ahead for the site to be developed. (See item 3)

2. Julia Hilton: Update on the UNESCO World Heritage Site status proposal

Since the October H & St. L Society Open Meeting presentation on the proposal to work towards a World Heritage Site status application for an area in Hastings or St. Leonards-on-Sea, two 'scoping' meetings have been hosted by Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA)

Steve Manwaring (HVA) provided a conclusions paper following the scoping discussions. The main points are:

1. That a "plausible" application could be advanced by drawing together different threads of activity to create an over-arching "narrative" which could meet the UNESCO criteria. Hastings is clearly an area which could rightly claim a unique historical place in the nations development as well as having sites of national and international significance.
2. However, the cost of mounting a credible application were considerable (estimated at least £250,000) and the process would need considerable support from the Local Authority at a time when HBC resources in terms of both finance and officer capacity were significantly reduced.
3. Furthermore, it was felt that if a serious dialogue was to be established with UNESCO some work would be needed to create a firmer "foundation" to describe the broad historical narrative which would be at the heart of any application.
4. Based on this it was felt that to advance a formal application at this stage would not be advisable but, rather attention should be focused on undertaking some further preparatory work to increase the presentation of key sites and ideas relating to the history of Hastings.

Julia (supported by Alistair Fairley) maintained that the proposal is still alive and that perhaps the most attractive focus of an application would be Hastings Castle (Listed, Grade 1). It was also mentioned that drawing people together and alerting the general public during the work on an application has outstanding benefit, even if ultimately the application is unsuccessful.

3. Virginia Vilela (representing West Marina Group): Up-date on residents group meetings to discuss Old Bathing Pool Site

Virginia gave a report on the public meeting held on 9 January to discuss with councillors the intentions of the site being developed for residential and business use. Concerns expressed by residents included: car parking and access; how development of the bathing pool site would relate to future development of the MoD and Stamco sites and the wider neighbourhood; and the lack of experience of the proposed developers in leisure and recreation projects. The councillors couldn't give very clear answers on any of these points.

Concerns about the future of the site were a topic at the H & St. L Society Open Meeting of 15 February 2018. At that meeting it was proposed that a residents group be formed and work towards a Neighbourhood Plan, which HBC would have to take into consideration. When asked if that had progressed, Virginia stated that a N. P. had not come about because of a difficulty in agreeing a boundary with HBC.

Since the meeting of 9 January, HBC has published notice of its intention to dispose of the open (green) space – objections to be submitted by 1 March. Virginia has permission to speak on behalf of the residents group at the Council's Cabinet Meeting on 4 March.

*Virginia provided a leaflet outlining the residents group's campaign for on-going consultations with HBC and potential developers for the future of the site. There is also a website: <https://westmarina.org/>
And Facebook Page: St Leonards SOBS
If you wish to be put on the group's contact list e-mail:
virginiawrightuk@yahoo.co.uk

4. Chris Lewcock (Hastings Urban Design Group): Presentation on the St. Leonard's Church building and surrounding area

St Leonards Church is a key architectural landmark within Burtons' St Leonards and for the whole Town. Sadly, due to the instability of the cliff and the poor condition of the building, it is now closed for religious use, and therefore there are concerns as to what will happen to this Listed building. There are also concerns about the surrounding landscape.

There are three urgent issues which need to be addressed. The stability and future of the Church itself. The stability of the land underlying the footpath. The possible risks to Victoria Court. Chris stressed that No action is not an option.

There are other important issues that require attention in the immediate vicinity and seriously detract from the amenities of local residents, the Conservation Area and the wider Town. The neglected wildlife site and the slope below the cemetery; the incomplete Undercliff housing development; the poor appearance of the Church "forecourt" and the car park on the seafront; the shortage of community facilities in the area.

At first sight there are significant opportunities in the area. The Church has a maritime theme and (an) appropriate use(s) could build on this to enhance the cultural and tourism "offer" of the Town. The existing role of the Church as a visual and physical focal point for the Conservation Area could be enhanced with improved links across the A259. The Church could be in part or whole put to community use. The Church might be converted or partly redeveloped to provide

housing. Improvements to the land on either side of the Church would enhance the Conservation Area and add cultural and tourism interest e.g. by improving access to Burtons' cemetery. This is not a comprehensive list and should be refined as engagement with interested parties and research is carried out. Clear options would need to be developed and choices made!

*More details from Chris's presentation, including possible objectives and suggestions for 'key players', can be found on the H & St. L Society's website (www.hastingsandstleonardssociety.org.uk)

Notes compiled by Steven (H & St. L Society secretary)