

HEATHFIELD PARTNERSHIP TRUST COMPANY LTD

CHAIRMANS REPORT 2008

A very warm welcome to all of our guests this evening. This has become the best opportunity to report to all interested parties on what the Partnership Trust Company has been up to over the last 12 months. This evening sees even more People, now associates of the Partnership and one or more of its operations, and this cooperative spirit is something that sets Heathfield apart from most Market Towns that we know of in the South East. Central to all of our work and progress is the harmonious relationship held with the Parish Council and then in addition, the Chamber of Trade and Rotary. The success of all initiatives in the Town has been the leadership of one of these four organizations and the absolute support from the other three.

My first duty then is to formally welcome the Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Ray Bassingthwaighte, his deputy Cllr Peter Newnham. The Chairman of the Chamber of Trade & Commerce, Trevor Goldsmith and the President of the Heathfield Area Rotary, Mr Bob Robinson.

The Annual General meeting of the Company is where we conduct the formal Governance of the Company, its annual accounts and the appointment of Directors and this now traditional annual account by way of the Chairman's report. I would also thank Alan Staples of Manningtons who acts as our Honorary Auditor who sadly cannot be here tonight.

I would also welcome our Directorate, Deputy Chairman and Company Secretary John Tolley, Honorary Treasurer, Tim Hough, Directors, Teresa Blaxland, Jack Hampton, Rosemary Mays-Smith, Alan Powell, Colin Williams and of course the aforementioned Trevor Goldsmith.

I would also like to pay tribute to our Officers who have given such excellent service to the Partnership this year. Sue Roach who edits our web-site, Karen Cook, Sheran Thorpe, custodian of the minutes this evening and a special mention in dispatches to Joanne Aldous. Joanne's management of our affairs during the last year has been outstanding and her quiet modest character belies a professional determination to support the Directors and Executive and I would thank her most especially for the support that she has given me in my endeavours to represent the Partnership Organisation as a whole.

I will mention several other People in dispatches as I go along but would also like to highlight one other Guest this evening. I will cover the progress of our web-site, Heathfield.net in some depth this evening and there have been some splendid triumphs, every single one of them will have been inspired by Nick Potter, a Director and Partner of 21st Century Internet Ltd., based in Cross in Hand. 21st Century is an industry leader in Internet Development (website design), delivering intelligent new media solutions. The creativity, ingenuity, intelligence and generosity of Nick has been nothing short of sensational and lead to the creation of a web-site and a community communication tool that Heathfield can be very proud of. Nick, It is a delight that you have been able to join us here this evening.

Looking back to my report at the AGM last year we were anticipating a number of targets and I will now take a whistle stop tour of the projects we have been involved in during the last year. Many of these have embraced more than one committee. Many have involved the web-site and so let us get to that. It had taken us a long time

to properly secure the portal for the Heathfield.net web-site. Temporarily this lay with the County Council although under investigation that had itself not been secured. Ultimately Nick Potter offered 21st Century to host the web-site and this is where it now resides. Having secured the portal we were then subject to attack by competitors for the title and various versions of our title had to be bought off. Should this happen again we will be more worldly wise.

The next mission was to revamp the web-site and its capacity to enable us to launch much more sophisticated sites with interaction and moving imagery. The long term objective was the launch of a new business web-site that would promote all businesses and services within the Heathfield & Waldron Parish. 21st Century's skills in this field, were crucial and Nick's mastery of the search engines to ensure all Heathfield businesses came out on top in any listing has proven to be quite frankly, outrageous. First we had to step back and re-create the old site and the way it was programmed to enable the greater capacity to be achieved. Teresa Blaxland's committee redesigned all the buttons (a bona-fide technical term) and the lay-out. Once agreed 21st Century set to work. There have been commissions that we have secured for programming parts of the web-site but the base and the business site are 21st Century's magnanimous contribution to the regeneration of Heathfield. Many more man hours of programming than anticipated when first offered, Nick and his Partners have never held back and we now have something which is magical. A lot of work will still need to be done in re-programming the new sites with fresh text, film and photographs but the journey is in full swing and the hits being recorded for Heathfield.net have been going through the roof. 29,000 in one month is the highest so far. Much more extraordinary is that 21st Century have been able to demonstrate every site visit by recording what pages were brought up, even the location of the visitor. An astonishing number of site visits from the USA were identified in the last report. For businesses this will be sensational in proving how effective their listing is and perhaps encouraging them to upgrade to illustrations and special offers. The basic listing of every business, its type and description and ordinance survey map location is of course absolutely free but Nick has added some bells and whistles which should be very attractive and with a small charge that will help contribute to programming costs. Keeping everything up to date will be the achievement.

One specific project has been completed and that is the launch of the Police Site. This was successfully launched in February at the Police Station. This enables P.C. Cathy Codling and her team of, soon to be, 5 PCSOs, to provide information to the Public. This site also enables citizens to record a crime report directly to Cathy and her Team. That easy identity with the Officers of the Heathfield Police Team is further security to the public and ready information on the progress that Cathy and her Team have made with arrests and Anti-social orders for example is reassuring to those anxious about safety and vandalism. The Business community was extremely alarmed about the way things were going just over a year ago with smashed shop windows a frequent occurrence. There is now a very different appreciation of the service they are receiving.

This has also been the challenge for the Police Local Action Team Committee who have championed the cause of improving support for our Police Team. During the year we had a number of run ins with the Chief Inspector and his Inspector. Our battles regarding CCTV were in full flow and do we remember the issue of the dispersal order. For Parish Councillors, I am sure, a similar shudder. The LATs committee is now much more secure with its new Chairman, Parish Councillor Pat Clarke, sadly unable to be with us this evening and back up from Sheran Thorpe.

Cathy and her staff are also more relaxed about their role and life can move on. A timely moment to commend Cathy and Her Team of Officers for the magnificent job they have done in improving the safety and confidence of the Town and its surrounding villages. I should also acknowledge the contribution of the Churches Together in Heathfield, Street Pastors initiative and their presence on the streets, calming situations. This has now been seen as a good idea by Hastings and Eastbourne Town Councils and they are soon to follow our example. Their leader, Ruth Waller has joined the Partnership Executive and also the LAT committee and she is particularly welcome at her first AGM.

Much of the trouble that had been the case in the Town involved youths who for whatever reason had nothing better to do. The best example of our young is the youth council in the youth centre. It has been our long term intention to set up a web-site for them to run. This began on the 1st October with its basic platform. Eventually we will see all sorts of regular features including examples of music and video by Heathfield College bands, Agony aunt and agony uncle sections, following the popularity of TV food programmes, Student Recipes and cookery recommendations. This should under Beata Drury, the Youth Centre manager, develop an Information advice and guidance programme which can be re-assuring, informative and inspirational to teenagers as they develop. There will also be a fully comprehensive what's on in Heathfield section especially at the Youth Centre. Benefiting the youth centre and increasing its attendances has got to be a constructive way forward for the Town. There is no more damning statement from a young person in our community who says that there is nothing of them to do. A bored teenager is a recipe for difficulties. In raising the capacity of the Youth Centre we also had to address another problem and that was getting the Young, particularly those residing in isolation in the rural hinterland surrounding Heathfield, into the Youth Centre and then having done that, out again on expeditions to purposeful projects such as cinemas or swimming pools.

Last year I reported on the breakdown in discussions with the Red Cross for a community Bus project. After that set back I was still determined to see what could be done with a much smaller scale operation using existing vehicles. I am very pleased to report that with the help of Age Concern, The Kings Church and the Community College (and the Parish Council) we are launching a community Bus service. That is quite an extraordinary statement in itself, to be launching a bus service. However it is true and already from this October to the end of the year we will launch a youth project branded the "Youth Express" to solve exactly the problems of access to the youth centre that I illustrated a few moments ago. That will run on until the end of the financial year. From January we will open up the service to Heathfield Groups and Clubs that are in need of Transport. I have been able to secure £10,000 from the County Council Children's Services department for the Youth Express project which will give us a kick start. Looking into the future, the County Council is questioning the £13 million it puts into Bus subsidies every year and may well turn towards community projects. It can only be said that we are putting ourselves in the best position should they move in this direction. In the early months this is going to be quite difficult for us to organize but it is a challenge most certainly worth fighting for. My absolute admiration for Beata Drury who deserves all of our appreciation for the imagination she brings to the role of managing the Youth Centre and indeed all the Young and Youth workers who are involved there and the respect she enjoys from the Youth but also Joanne who has taken on the business of arranging Buses when needed. It is a magnificent double act!

The newest Committee that of the Transport Committee now is a stand alone operation and I would single out Parish Councillor John Kirby for the influential role he has undertaken on it. Also Lorraine Alford, the business manager of the Community College, Geoff Smith of Age Concern and Andy Delves from the Kings Church. It is hoped that Parish Councillor, Mike Woodhouse, his wife Jenny and their Huffle Nursery operation will be able to participate in the future.

For the "Youth Express," the already launched Youth Web-site will of course be the central communication channel for this service. It has already served its purpose magnificently by running the necessary response survey (80 completions recorded already) before the project started. Further surveys will be conducted during and at the end of the 6 months to see what a difference was made.

The Web-site is not the only responsibility of the ICT committee. The PiP programme has had many challenges this year. The cleverness of the digital photos and mobile phone top-ups proved problematic and eventually these are being taken out. The Web access service will now be all the more reliable and hopefully with wireless connections which will enable business People to use their laptops in our public sites. Having moved the PiP at Rushlake Green back onto our own patch, the change of management at the Crown Pub has proven difficult and it may mean another consideration being given for Broad Oak Stores once more, especially as Derrick has staved off a post office closure threat and invested in a refurbished store. Teresa Blaxland did a presentation at a WARR conference at the end of last month showing off the ingenuity of the scheme and the valuable public information service this can provide. It would also be appropriate if we acknowledged the outstanding support that Stefan Danielczyk (ESCC) has provided for the ICT committee in facilitating the PiP programme.

A year ago I talked about the soon to be launched new Town sign. This was a tremendous success, a particularly dignified design. This has enhanced the entrance to the Town from the east and will be fully complimentary to the developments in the Parade. More on that later. The Town sign was Jack Hampton's lead and so was the Heathfield Carnival that followed in July of this year. Rotary were to put on the most magnificent success that anybody could have dreamed of. 49 floats and 10,000 People involved. It proved that given the right vehicle, the People of Heathfield could be motivated and once stirred, could reveal their creative spirit and humour. An exhilarating experience to be involved. I think that Rosemary, the Reverend Jane Sherwin and I found it a formidable task to judge the Float competition.

The Inward Investment Team have had a busy year with several projects coming to fruition. The Business promotion brochure was beautifully produced and distributed throughout all the shops and estate agents but in a full run of Heathfield First, the publication run by the Chamber. That scheme was complimentary to the new Business Web-site that I talked about earlier and also the Town information Boards. These have gone up outside of the Coop, the entrance to Budgen's car park and outside of the Weald Business Centre. This can take up to date information off the Web-site straight onto the information Boards. A further Board to be located close to Tesco's should be completed next year.

In January 2008 the Heathfield Partnership was approached by the East Sussex Economic Partnership to host a Market Towns conference. As we were about to make a bid to them we thought that we had better curry favour and dutifully the show went

on. The venue was the Community Centre and I was assisted by Cllr Ray Bassingthwaighe, Trevor Goldsmith and then President of Rotary, Graeme Hird. The theme was the rise and fall and rise again of Heathfield. Joanne Aldous researched several local historians for photographs of Heathfield from as far back as possible, before the new Town was formed, to its pomp with a busy railway station and goods yard, to the bleakness of the early 90s and the renaissance of the regenerated High Street. Many of the illustrations came from post cards but Joanne got them digitally copied and the presentation of 50 of the finest came across as I made the presentation. Some of these are already on the home page of the re-launched Heathfield.net and the rest will be on it soon.

I was able to emphasize the success in Heathfield being the cooperation between the major players with testimonies from all Partners, delegates from Crowborough looked on in despair. My defiant punchline in defence of free car parking also caused a stir but to-date we have kept the hangman's noose from our necks. In calculating the work done to date, I was able to present an investment record of in excess of £1 million. That has taken a lot of hard work and determination. Hopefully there are more success stories to come.

In 2008 the Heathfield Partnership were able to make another bid for money from SEEDA. After our success with the Market Town revitalization Fund in 2001, we had been blocked for 7 years. A new scheme involving funding for small Market Towns was up and running but we were necessarily late getting in the door and opportunities seemed remote because of previous commitments. However the then Chief Executive of the East Sussex Economic Partnership was keen on what we were planning and suggested that we bid anyway as some schemes looked as though they would not be able to be confirmed. Subsequently we ran with two proposals. The first was for the completion of the High Street programme including the Parade. The second was a long term ambition of the Partnership to set up a business incubator site. 8 or so starter units with shared reception and telecommunications service. With Trevor's help we had the ideal site and the cooperative landlord who was prepared to build the units, could we supply the reception centre. Soon after placing our bids, the East Sussex Economic Partnership flattered out of existence and the SEEDA money would now come through the County Council. New rules applied, firstly only one bid for one project would be accepted and that to a maximum sum of £70,000. We took this decision back to the Board who decided that after the huge efforts of the High Street Committee to engineer the solutions to the remaining redevelopment of the high street and its readiness to go, that would be the one we pursued. New application forms were of course required and these plus drawings were submitted on the 6th October. A great deal of work went into the final packaging of the bid as matched funding was required. I managed to get the accreditation of the business web-site included and the value of 21st Century's contribution along with the many hours/years of ESCC Officers time. I have also negotiated an increase on the maximum sum allowed and if we are successful then we would have a further £85,000 and should be able to commence the final work stage in April 2009. This will include a new Puffin Crossing and a mini-roundabout with Station Road. Fingers crossed that we will be successful and that this longest running of all our campaigns will be completed and peace can break out in Heathfield High Street. This will of course be the triumph of Rosemary Mays-Smith who has championed this cause throughout over the last 15 years and kept the discipline of the project together when nobody knew where the next penny farthing was coming from. I would also acknowledge the help of Jon Wheeler (ESCC

Officer) who helped enormously with the costings of the exercise. I am due to be taking the monitoring Officer through the Town tomorrow morning on a site visit to show what has been done and where we seek to complete the programme. My apologies to Teresa Blaxland as I will be slightly late for the ICT meeting.

From one of Rosemary's enterprises to another, the Sport & Leisure Committee. Last year's end of term report had been excellent with two major pieces of work completed. The feasibility study and the business plan. This year has been much to do with diplomatic negotiations with Wealden District Council who are the Leisure Authority. Protocol agreements have been made with usage of the WDC logo and ratified by the Cabinet. Agreement has also been made that Helen Markwick, the relevant Officer, will attend occasional committee meetings. A resounding bounding enthusiasm it is not, although Leader of the Council, Pam Doodes and Portfolio holder Sylvia Tidy were very supportive when attending Committee meetings. There has also been considerable help from WDC members, Niki Oakes, Jan Dunk and especially new to the operation Ann Newton. We have acknowledged the realism that none of the capital for this project is going to come from WDC. We hope that this will release some of the anxiety amongst Senior Officers. The strategy is now set for the overall Swimming Pool, Leisure Centre and MUGA to be sought as one programme. The next steps are design drawings and a full planning application. The Community College have been gracious to agree to allow the application be made in their name. For a short spell in the summer there was the possible funding of the whole venture to the tune of £3.64 million including £50,000 for planning application costs. The "My Space" bid came at short notice, was not as well researched as it could have been, given more time and fell at the first hurdle. There is some considerable cynicism which might lead you to believe that Hastings would have won the bid anyway. Rosemary has already addressed the need for better preparedness and the committee will be in better shape next time. What is sadly irretrievable is the passing of Bob Kiernan. A magnificent servant to the Sport & Leisure Committee who made a major contribution to the business plan. He will be very much missed. Missed by the College as well, he had been an outstanding Governor for 20 years.

It has been my custom to sit in on occasional Farmers Market Committee meetings. Indeed I have endeavoured to get to every project committee meeting throughout the year. It is my pleasure to tell you of the smoothest running of all our operations and that is down to the management of Colin Williams. One of the Farmers, David Turton, Chairs the Committee and several Traders are on it but the hard truth is that it runs as well as it does because of Colin and his wife Sue. Colin has also endured some ill health this year and the extra effort of putting on a major stand at the Heathfield Show also took its toll. We need to be looking to provide Colin some greater support for his management of the Monthly Market to ensure that everything is that much more sustainable and less of a strain for one man. There is no doubt that the personal care that Colin takes with the Traders has much to do with the splendid atmosphere at the Heathfield market and the increased turnover for all concerned. I am also pleased to say that discussions I had with the manager of the COOP Store, Mark Shadwell, have also gone well and this helps to secure the site for the future.

Looking ahead to next year there will be the completion of the High Street, the submission of the Planning application for the Swimming Pool and enhanced Leisure Centre, the creation no doubt of a revamped Tourism section and History section on the web-site and a mega promotion of Heathfield.net throughout the Town. We will

hope to set up a starter business centre in conjunction with our Partner Developer and we will no doubt see an expanding bus service hopefully making some logical links to the surviving commercial sector time table.

In the immediate future will be the turning on of the Christmas Lights, the Christmas Family day on Saturday November the 29th. With the advent of Christmas itself, hopefully some time off for the tireless Volunteers who make this Partnership work so wonderfully well.

This annual account is a splendid opportunity to reflect on the contributions of so many People. The partnerships that we have built with the Parish Council, Chamber, Rotary, the College, The County Council, the District Council, the Police Team, Churches Together, The Kings Church and many more besides, all have been hugely beneficial to the People of Heathfield and surrounding Parish. The funding streams are precarious but we have endeavoured to be at our most professional during the bidding process that we go through so many times a year. The glamorous triumphs of project funds are sung from the hilltops when they are won but I would single out here my special thanks to the Parish Council who have steadfastly made the greatest contribution to fund the base costs of the operation. No glamour there but without sound foundations we would be a haphazard amateur operation with far less capability in the competitive arena of bid making. There would ultimately be no hilltop singing at all were it not for their support at the outset every year.

We spent some time this year working with Nigel Eveleigh of WDC who is responsible for the evolving Local Development Framework which will be profoundly influential on the way the Town develops over the next 10 years and beyond. Following consultation on our contribution especially with the Inward Investment Committee and learning of our programme over the past 15 years he was to report back to Wealden District Council that Heathfield as a Market Town was punching well above its weight. I can think of no better compliment or testimony for the activities of everybody in this room.

CLLR. RUPERT SIMMONS.