

HEATHFIELD PARTNERSHIP TRUST LTD, CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2023

Thank you to all of you who are joining us for this virtual Annual General Meeting. This will be a meeting of the Heathfield Partnership Trust accounts, presented by our Auditors for public approval.

This will be my first AGM as Chairman of the Trust, and the 28th year in our capacity as a steering group, originally set up by the Parish Council as an independent body capable of raising funds to invest in the local community. The Partnership makes its annual accounts available for public scrutiny.

Members of the public and strategic partners are free to ask questions of the Partnership and its Directors. Our Annual Accounts are freely available to all. On-line today will be our Auditor, Alan Staples and our own Treasurer and Director, Tim Hough, to answer any questions you may have.

I would like to acknowledge the significant help, support and guidance that Alan, and his team at Mannington's, provides to us throughout the year, which is hugely appreciated.

During our long history we have always provided public accountability in the way we conduct our business. We have an Executive Committee where all strategic Partners are able to appoint a representative to attend and examine the details of our projects. The minutes of these meetings are published on the Heathfield.net website. All project committees include a Heathfield Parish Councillor as part of the membership, and we report to the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the Parish Council in time for their annual autumn meeting.

As a limited company we make an annual report to Company's House, and as a Registered Charity we report annually to the Charity Commission. Those disciplines are followed rigorously. This Chairman's report will also be published on the www.Heathfield.net website.

Farmer's Market (by Paula Greer):

The Farmers market continues to be a part of the Heathfield community, taking place on the third Saturday of each month with a good mix of food and drink produce and craft stalls, selling varied merchandise and goods made locally. We continue to gain new enquiries and very much embrace new stallholders.

In previous years we have worked with Young Famers who set up the stalls and display the promotional Farmers Market banners in and around the Town leading up to Market Day. After receiving notice from them early in 2023, HPT had to explore alternative arrangements. After many months of searching and endless enquiries for replacement stall erectors with no luck, HPT members concluded the only way to keep the farmers' market running, was for stall holders to provide their own gazebos. In May we held the first market with this new look, and I am pleased to say that it gives the market an attractive and artisan feel. We lost a small number of stall holders, primarily due to the inability to transport their gazebos.

Due to the reduced financial outlay of no longer paying an organisation to pitch up the stalls, it has enabled HPT to reduce the pitch fee to stall holders.

The market is well supported, and we are currently averaging around eighteen stalls per month. Naturally we would like to have a few more stalls, but with the numbers we are attracting, the market is doing well. We thank coop for their ongoing support and providing the prime location.

Inward Investment (previously prepared by Rupert Simmons):

In previous years the Partnership have been very successful in gaining funding for Inward Investment within the parish and are always looking at ways of securing further funding. With the HPT's charitable status we are able to apply for grants where other local organisations may not be able to, with this in mind HPT wish to partner with these other local organisations in order to aid them to raise such funds where the objective is to be a benefit to the residents and businesses within the town. HPT supply and update annually the tourist information boards located throughout the town, listing all current high street retailers and High Street Businesses, these are also used for the promotion of local events.

We have been heavily involved in making representation to Wealden District Council (the local Planning Authority) for commercial development opportunities in the town in their drafting of a new Local Plan. This plan was eventually found deficient by the inspector. We are now considering making suitable representations to the new Draft Local Plan currently being created. New housing provision (especially affordable) will also positively impact on the town centre. We also made representation to the Local Authority regarding rateable value rebates for Retailers in the Town. This was sympathetic to pressure from Online alternatives to the High Street and the Covid 19 pandemic reduction in footfall.

We are increasingly concerned about pressure being brought to bear on retail tenants in the Town who are facing undue difficulties from their landlords in maintaining their tenancy. This step by step weakens the attraction of the Town and dilute its footfall. The Mass weight of the retail offer is the Town's current strength, and any diminution is to its disadvantage.

Youth Initiative (by Richard Karn):

The HPT Youth Committee has provided focus on the needs of younger people in our community by co-ordinating activities and sharing information across local organisations. I was asked to chair the Committee by the Board in the summer. The group had not met for several months (*due to redevelopment plans for the youth centre*) prior to this and in the intervening period the Parish Council formed its own Youth Committee, driven particularly by the desire to support the redevelopment of the Youth Centre being led by East Sussex County Council.

After discussion with the Parish Council it has been agreed that the two committees be merged to create a single forum for the town. The new working group is organised by the Parish Council, and HPT is represented on the group by myself and Tora Bowdler.

Alongside monitoring and supporting the redevelopment of the Youth Centre and ensuring that this resource delivers maximum benefit for the town when it opens in 2024/5 the Committee are examining opportunities to provide a graffiti wall and a covered shelter particularly aimed at girls.

Anyone interested in the work of the Youth Committee or wishing to discuss a project that has potential to enhance life in our community for younger residents should contact the Clerk at HWPC in the first instance for details of the next meeting.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) (Lisa):

The Partnership recognise the need to update the current website. Heathfield.net. The redesign is currently underway. All content requires updating and to avoid cross overs and duplication with both the Parish Council and Chamber of Commerce, the three organisations see a need to streamline the three websites, so they work coherently together.

Funds have been allocated for the redesign of the site and the business has been placed with a local web developer located on the high street and is currently work in progress. The Partnership website is a hub of local information detailing current activities within the Parish of Heathfield and Waldron. This includes all Businesses and services in the Parish plus all Societies, Groups and clubs. The website incorporates the history of the area and cultural information. The HPT Facebook page will continue to share and promote local events, activities and news to the local community alongside other local

organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce, The Parish Council, Churches Together the Heathfield Rotary and other such organisations.

Our Facebook and Twitter accounts (both called heathfieldabout) are complimentary to the website, The heathfieldabout services are set up in conjunction with the Heathfield Community College, the Parish Council and the Heathfield Area Chamber of Commerce. These are vital services to the community as a whole, promoting the Town and its services to all Residents and Businesses.

Police Local Action Team (LAT) (Tora):

The local Police Inspector has always attended these committee meetings to discuss policing in the parish and has listened to concerns raised by the members. With the arrival of a new inspector, in summer of 2023, he voiced his concerns about his time spent at these local meetings and offered a full report on police activity within the area as opposed to his attendance. With the CSAG committee in existence, a large number of the LATS members and the police representative were already in attendance on the CSAG. It was agreed that two committees were duplicating information and therefore, at the last LATS meeting in October, this committee be dissolved.

Stakeholders:

We acknowledge the contribution made in the community by a varied group of organisations. The efforts of Brighter Heathfield make such a difference to the appearance and appeal of the Town. The presence of the Street Pastors is a great influence on affairs on Friday and Saturday nights. The Heathfield Community College has again distinguished itself with its exam performances. A first-class effort by Richard Ridley and his Committee in putting on the Le Marche event at the end of August, a great promotion for the Town. The Chamber of Commerce, who make a lot of effort to promote retail business in the Town. The Parish Council, who are surveying what more they can do to improve the experience of residents in the Parish.

There is a collective strength in our community which does a great deal to raise the spirits of the People who live and/or work in our Town.

Conclusion:

The Partnership Trust is a voluntary organisation and is very dependent, particularly on it's Directors, who go out of their way to make a massive contribution to the community they serve. I would certainly wish to highlight the contribution of my Deputy, and mentor, Peter Bailey, who also serves as Company Secretary, he has made a major contribution, as indeed has our Honorary Treasurer, Tim Hough. I would also acknowledge the contributions of Lisa Crozier and Tora Bowdler, who have managed magnificently, they both continue to do a sterling job for us, particularly at this time when we do not have a permanent home.

Looking forward, we will need to continue to do all we can to ensure the High Street remains vibrant and attracts both new businesses, and shoppers to our Market Town, which, thanks to Wealden District Council, continues to benefit from free parking, one of only three districts in England where this is the case!

I hope you will all take advantage of the Promotion on the 24th of November with late night shopping to maximise the beginning of the Christmas Season. It will make a difference to the vibrancy of the Town, and please, whenever you can **SHOP LOCAL!**

Bob Bowdler
Chairman, The Heathfield Partnership Trust Ltd