

HEATHFIELD PARTNERSHIP TRUST LTD, CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2024

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

As Chairman of the Trust, now in its the 29th year in its capacity as a steering group, which was 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 it's Directors. Our Annual Accounts are freely available to all on-line. Today we are joined by our Auditor, Alan Staples, and our own Treasurer, Director and Parish Councillor, Tim Hough, to answer any questions you may have.

We would like to acknowledge the significant assistance, support and guidance that Alan and his team at Manningtons'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 will 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, we hope new, www.Heathfield.net website.

Farmer's Market (by Paula Gear)

Heathfield, as a market town, has held a Farmers' Market for well over twenty years. The market runs on the third Saturday morning of each month. It is held in the Co-op car park and we are extremely grateful to the Co-op for allowing us to use their land for the benefit of the town.

There is a wide selection of goods and produce available from local stall holders. Many of our talented residents sell their crafts there. We allow charities to have a stall three times a year free of charge and this offer is taken up regularly by different charities.

We are now in the second year of our stallholders bringing their own gazebos and everyone is happy with this arrangement. It enables the stall holders to decorate and display their goods in their own style which gives the market an appealing artisan feel.

The number of stalls varies each month, but we usually have between fifteen and eighteen stalls, most of which are regular attendees. Unfortunately, this year the weather hasn't been in our favour and we have had a number of wet market days which has had an effect on footfall.

We are always looking to grow and welcome new and different stalls to the market. We do this through social media, advertising and visiting stall holders at other markets.

Inward Investment:

In previous years the Partnership has been very successful in gaining funding for Inward Investment within the parish and we are always exploring other ways of securing additional funding. Utilizing our charitable status we are able to apply for grants where other local organisations may not have access. With this in mind HPT may wish to partner with other local organisations in order to aide their fund raising opportunities, specifically where the objective has the potential to bring benefit to the residents and businesses within our 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 representations to Wealden District Council in relation to the preparation of their new LOCAL PLAN, specifically to underscore the need for commercial development opportunities in the town. This plan was eventually found deficient by the inspector. We are now considering making additional representations for inclusion in their latest update, which we understand is currently in progress. New, sensible, housing provision (especially affordable) will also positively impact on the town centre and the surrounding area.

We also made representation to the Local Authority regarding rateable value rebates for Retailers in the Town. This was with a view to combatting the pressure we all feel from the giant on-line alternatives who are sucking the life away from the High Street.

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 continues to adversely affect the Town and dilute its footfall. The mass weight and variety of the retail offer of our High Street is its strength, and its needs all of us to actually go out and use it!

A last thought on this topic, we invite any partner agency, or individual resident, with ideas for projects that may benefit, energise or enhance our local economy, to speak to us, we would love to hear from you and discuss how we may be able to help.

Youth Initiative (by Richard Ridley)

Heathfield Youth Working Party was formed in October 2023. It is now the combination of the HPT committee and the Parish Council Youth subcommittee. The Working party met 4 times in 2024.

Attendees are representatives from the Parish Council, HPT, East Sussex County Council, Wealden Works, Street Pastors, Heathfield Community College, The Police

Matters discussed included:

- The new Youth Centre, which is now scheduled to open in the Spring of 2025
- A shelter meeting place for youth
- Funding requirements and the possibility of HPT used for fund raising
- A shopping list of equipment needed in the new Centre
- A leaflet covering the Youth Plan of Action for distribution.
- Youth Centre staff recruitment and current youth sessions
- The skatepark condition and lease renewal

Our thanks to Chairs David Whithouse and Paul Dunstall

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

The Partnership's website has now been redesigned and is live. There is more content to be added over the next few weeks but we are very happy with the new design and feel it is very user friendly. We have worked in conjunction with The Heathfield and Waldron Parish Council and the Heathfield Chamber of commerce, so that there is no duplication of content.

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 account (heathfieldabout) is 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)

Since the dissolution of the LATs meeting in October last year, the partnership has been attending the online Safer Wealden Partnership Meetings which are attended by other agencies and the local policing team. There is an update on policing matters within Wealden and information given on targeted operations they are running.

"Breaking news", we understand that Sussex Police are intending to withdraw from this partnership? More news as it becomes available

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

Again, there was 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 go to a lot of effort to promote retail business in the Town. The 'Twinning Group' for all they do, and The Parish Council, who are continually searching for what more they can do to improve the experience of residents in the Parish. And not forgetting the wonderful Heathfield Show, the largest one day agricultural show in the country, and we should be very proud of it. Then there is the Heathfield Bonfire Society, brilliantly keeping the history of Sussex alive in Heathfield.

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 reliant on the diligence of its 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, 'Young Tim Hough'. I would wish to acknowledge the contributions of Lisa Crozier and Tora Bowdler, who have managed the partnership magnificently, they both continue to do a sterling job on our behalf.

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, which, thanks to Wealden District Council, continues to benefit from free parking, one of only three districts in England where this is the case!

Thank you for taking the time and interest, and as always **SHOP LOCAL!**

Bob Bowdler
Chairman, The Heathfield Partnership Trust Ltd