

Hastings & St Leonards Local Strategic Partnership Meeting

Monday, 25th April, 2016

Update on University of Brighton in Hastings

Preamble

1. The situation regarding the future of Higher Education (HE) is fast moving and the Council (like other partners) will not have the whole picture at any one time.
2. This briefing builds on one given to the Hastings and Rother Task Force on 18th March. Many members will therefore be familiar with the early contents. The latter part of the briefing is the author's understanding of the position at 12th April, 2016.

Introduction

3. Brighton University is one of the leading regeneration partners in Hastings and Rother, playing a leading role in work to deliver substantial parts of the educational regeneration plank of the original six point regeneration plan.
4. Originally named 'University Centre Hastings' the centre was opened in 2003 in a building previously occupied by BT. As a 'University Centre', the institute allowed students to gain a degree from a number of universities working in partnership, including the University of Brighton and the University of Greenwich.
5. By 2009 however, the University of Brighton was offering the majority of courses at University Centre Hastings, as other partners withdrew.
6. At this stage, the University took on the 'University Centre Hastings' as its fifth campus. (The University has four other campuses at Falmer, Grand Parade Brighton, Moulsecoomb and Eastbourne). The name was changed to 'University of Brighton in Hastings'.
7. In 2012 the University of Brighton opened a second building in Hastings; 'Priory Quarter', as the area in which it was situated was named, was taking shape rapidly as both a business and education district. And the University of Brighton had aspirations to grow student numbers on the Hastings campus to 1,500 and further possible ambitions to raise this to 2,000 moving forward.
8. Professor Debra Humphris, the newly appointed Vice Chancellor of the University of Brighton, attended a meeting of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) on 25th January 2016. She announced that the University of Brighton was carrying out an *internal* review of its operation in Hastings. The Vice Chancellor made it clear that Hastings was the only campus under review and that the review did not cover the University's role as a lead sponsor of the Hastings Academies Trust, which sponsors a number of primary and secondary providers in Hastings. The Vice Chancellor stated that the University had not attracted as many students as it had hoped to the Hastings campus. She explained that for the campus to be financially viable they needed to examine a range of options from continuing with the current model to complete closure.

9. The University of Brighton appointed BDO, an accountancy and business advisory firm, to conduct the review on their behalf. In the interest of transparency, the University were asked to share with partners a copy of the consultant's brief. This request was declined on the grounds of commercial sensitivity and confidentiality.
10. BDO consultants met with the leader and a director of Hastings Borough Council on 1st February 2016. The CEO of Seachange Sussex (formerly Seaspaces), John Shaw, was also in attendance. The meeting lasted one hour and it was clear from the Council's perspective that the University were keen to focus on options for managing out rather than growth/expansion.
11. BDO Consultants did not circulate their draft report for comments and to date neither Hastings Council nor the other councils have received a copy of the report.
12. The Local Strategic Partnership held an urgent partnership meeting on 9th February 2016 to enable partners to share feedback of their experiences of being interviewed by BDO and identify next steps. In addition to Hastings Borough Council, only the CEO of Sussex Coast College was involved in discussion with BDO and there was real concern about the lack of a wider engagement by partners.
13. Partners shared concerns around the wider impact any reduction or withdrawal would have on the economic and social regeneration of the town. However, in the spirit of partnership working, partners were very keen to engage with the University of Brighton and provide any assistance necessary to improve the 'student offer' in Hastings.
14. Partners agreed to draft a letter inviting the University of Brighton to a joint high level Task Force that could co-design a suitable package attractive to students, enable the University to remain in Hastings and maximise recruitment. This was sent on 16th February and signed by the local MPs, council leaders and community and business representatives. The reply dated 16th March is attached.
15. On 8th March the University of Brighton's Board of Governors met to discuss the future of the University of Brighton's Hastings Campus and as a result of the BDO consultants' study, the University Management Board were able to make 'a clear recommendation' to the Board of Governors.
16. Following the meeting of the Governing Board, the University of Brighton issued a press release. This stated that the University of Brighton 'will continue to support higher education in Hastings' and 'play an important role in the continuing social and economic regeneration of Hastings'.
17. It went on to say the review found that:
 - a) Whilst the current model for higher education provision has been successful in opening up higher education opportunities in the town, it is not sustainable in the longer term.
 - b) A predicted sharp fall in the number of 16-17 year olds in the town and surrounding areas mirrors a similar trend across the rest of the UK.
 - c) This is resulting in increased competition for students both nationally and internationally.

- d) Any future investment in Hastings by the University needs to take into account not only its impact on the town and surrounding area, but also the University's wider strategic priorities, future sustainability and growth .
18. The only formal meeting between any of the local authorities and the University since the LSP meeting involved Hastings Borough Council alongside Sussex Coast College on 9th March. This took place immediately after the Vice Chancellor had met staff and students at the University to discuss the Board's decision.

Hastings & Rother Task Force Meeting – 18th March, 2016

19. The meeting discussed in the broadest terms a way forward. The University and the College had very early discussions about working together in the future. It was clearly critical to Hastings and Rother that a University presence remains in Hastings and that sufficient assets in terms of course, people and buildings are available to allow a new future to be developed.
20. Partners felt that the way the process was undertaken has left local partners unprepared for discussion and feeling excluded from debate about an institution regarded as a symbol of the town's transformation and from the debate about how HE should move forward.
21. However, it was recognised that this position is most unlikely to be fundamentally changed and that realistically work should be directed to replace the existing presence with something else.
22. Local partners, including the councils, have insufficient understanding of the rapidly changing HE market to effectively address this agenda. It was thought to be worthwhile employing independent expertise to advise them and Task Force partners on how a long term agenda may be developed for the growth of HE in the area. We need to understand if other institutions are willing (and will be allowed) to participate in a future University Centre.
23. It is known there are positive examples of developing new Universities from small starts. Falmouth and Lincoln are two examples currently being quoted but this will need to be studied. Government is also encouraging private sector entry into the market, which is driven by student fees and research.
24. Future provision must be viable and be built on a proper analysis of opportunity, and particularly the likely future market. Students are customers and will come for courses that meet their needs and (to some extent) a place that 'rings their bells'. Although locally we believe that Hastings and the surrounding area is a fantastic place to study and live this may not be readily apparent to everyone in our potential market. Our future provision cannot be dependent on a local market that is too small to support a viable programme of courses.
25. We will need to consider how future students are housed here if we are to develop a sustainable future of any size. If this was easy someone would already have done it. A particular challenge is creating the conditions that would give a company or institution the confidence to invest in new or improved facilities.

Hastings & Rother Task Force Working Group

26. The Task Force agreed to set up a working group whose primary role was to develop an overview of the situation, and in particular to think about how to progress towards a long term and strategic approach to growing HE provision.
27. This group had an initial meeting on 30th March. At this point the University of Brighton and Sussex Coast College were not in a position to comment on which courses would be retained and which areas had been identified for rapid development. No final confirmation has been received from the University at this point but informal indications indicate that (although recruitment will take place for courses this year) little of the existing programme will be delivered after three years. Given the publicity around a 'doomed' campus it's not clear how successful recruitment in 2016/17 will be.
28. The group agreed that in reality there were three essential elements:-
 - i. The production of rapid proposals for new courses that could be developed quickly between Sussex Coast College and the University of Brighton. This work is the immediate business of the two academic institutions in consultation with others.
 - ii. The development of a 'University Centre' structure to act as a base for courses that are provided and potentially act as a vehicle for a future University. This is of critical interest to all partners, as it needs to both be set up quickly to allow rapid first steps but be suitable for development into a wider HE provision.
 - iii. The development of a brief for the employment of HE consultants to begin assessing future potential markets for HE provision, identify potential partners and start talking to them. This is work in progress and is touched on further below.
29. The Task Force meets again on 28th April and will receive a report back on progress and the working group will meet before this to pull together the various strands of work taking place.
30. An initial draft brief for consultants is being prepared for discussion with partners. Both ESCC and HBC have given commitments to fund this work and it is hoped that Rother Council will also be able to do so. The brief will be shared when a proper working draft is available. However, the ambition is that the commissioned work will be a full explanation of both the potential market(s) and the issues/challenges in developing them. It is crucial that decisions are taken with open eyes and that only those propositions which offer realistic chances of sustainability are explored in any depth.

Key Issues

31. Much is not known. Certainly many immediate decisions must be with Sussex Coast College and the University of Brighton in terms of commissioning new courses and assessing the academic and financial viability, and they need to outline progress on this directly. In the longer term there are a number of key issues.

32. Firstly, there does appear to be potential in a number of areas for the future, including international provision for education/business, virtual companies and niche subject delivery. There is a need to identify potential public or private providers and engage with them. However, we need to begin the process of talking ourselves and our potential 'up' in this engagement
33. Secondly, we know that there are a number of small universities and university centres that appear to be flourishing and we need to understand better how these function and why they succeed. Examples include Lincoln, Camborne and Falmouth. We also need to understand where this doesn't work, and why.
34. Any new provision will have some of the same challenges that the University of Brighton did. For instance some types of course might need the provision of halls of residence, better Student Union facilities and the costs of setting up, staffing and equipment. There is a level of risk, which local partners will want to help mitigate where possible, but it exists. This might involve seeking external funding or other methods of support.
35. It is believed that the courses being investigated in the shorter term by the University of Brighton and South Coast College will be relatively small compared with the University's earlier ambitions for 1,500+ students.
36. It is critical that any University Centre structure is a vehicle for going forward. To this end it needs to have the ability to deliver degrees and other provision validated by institutions other than the University of Brighton. If this is not the case it would be in reality a franchising operation for the University of Brighton, which cannot be desirable. It isn't clear if the University of Brighton and South Coast College have agreed this 'freedom' for the new structure. The position agreed by the University Vice Chancellor was that establishing a University of Hastings was an objective she supported. However, we don't yet have a short and structured statement from all parties acknowledging commitment to all three elements of work listed above and particularly linking decisions on buildings to future decisions/aspirations.
37. The advice we might receive about future provision may require different buildings or changes to buildings and it seems appropriate that decisions about University of Brighton premises await the outcome of this work. At the time of writing it is not clear how the University of Brighton and Sussex Coast College premises will be used or what other options are being discussed.
38. While the University of Brighton's actions are very significant in the next period, there is no apparent change to their decision to exit as a direct provider. Therefore the development steps must be in the hands of the local councils, Sussex Coast College, local business and community. The University of Brighton should be looked to for energetic support in this second phase rather than leadership. We need to honestly understand the full range of reasons the University of Brighton campus failed and how dramatically HE has changed and is changing. There is learning for us all (or most of us) if we want to approach this successfully. Simple assertion or belief cannot carry us forward.

39. Lastly, we need to avoid relationships between partners becoming fractured by the pressures arising from the University's decision. There is wide anger and concern, but we also need to move constructively forward. The local authorities collectively and Sussex Coast College need to take a strategic view, shared and developed with partners, and there will be difficult views and tensions. This means a willingness to be open and considered and leave the initial processes behind us.

Simon Hubbard
Director of Operational Services
Hastings Borough Council
April 2016

APPENDICES

Letter to Professor Humphris from local partners
Reply from Professor Humphris
Press statement dated 8th March

Please quote:
Your reference:
Date: 19th February 2016
Please ask for:
Telephone direct: Shabana Bayjou
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Hastings & St Leonards *strategic* partnership

Professor Debra Humphris
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Dear Professor Humphris,

University of Brighton Hastings Campus

As you know the recent announcement of the review being undertaken into the future of the Hastings campus has stimulated strong reactions of dismay from local people, business, students, staff and elected representatives. This is not reflective of any anti-university feeling, but demonstrates the affection in which it is held and how important its presence in Hastings is for the future of the town and the area around it.

We also believe that Hastings holds considerable opportunity for the University that could be developed collaboratively with local partners. The University committed to Hastings over 10 years ago when the economic and social climate of the town was at its bleakest. Thanks to the work of the broad partnership in which the University is an acknowledged leader, a whole range of initiatives have been delivered that offer part of the base for sustainable improvement:-

- The creation of the University campus itself.
- The creation of an Academy chain with a real focus upon improving the academic performance and future of local young people.
- A new campus for Sussex Coast College.
- New employment space in the town centre attracting new employers including SAGA.
- A belt of new employment space running down the west side of Hastings into North Bexhill, an opportunity opened up by the construction and opening of the new Link Road. This will also create c1,300 new homes.
- The creation of a new and exciting cultural agenda including the arrival of the Jerwood Gallery (in the face of competition from places like Birmingham and Gloucester) and the revamped Stade. This progress is moving along the seafront, just last weekend one of the largest BMX Centres and its youth and sporting focus opened and the refurbished Pier will open this Spring. Both these projects were created and delivered in spite of the massive economic and physical barriers, essentially driven by a will and energy in the locality which is not often found elsewhere.
- A new future for the fishing industry developed through the Fisheries Local Action Group in which the University is a leading member.
- A transformation in crime levels and the fear of crime which is beginning to be reflected more properly in the image of the town.
- Hastings intervention in the worst parts of the private rented sector to help rebalance St Leonards as part of that area's long term regeneration.



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

We understand that the University cannot sustain low student numbers and that this market is increasingly competitive. However, we also know that the public purse committed over £12m to create these facilities to deliver higher education in Hastings. The University is the moral custodian of this investment in the future of Hastings.

We believe that the lack of a hall of residence and a substantial Student Union are issues that may need to be addressed to create a successful future. It was clear that these issues were not the only or perhaps even the main ones. You spoke of the University's financial position and the attraction of Brighton to many potential students. You identified that the academic offer has not created sufficient demand for courses in Hastings. Clearly, there is an interlinked set of problems that cannot be resolved without addressing both the academic offer and the facilities available to students.

The bohemian atmosphere, cultural and music scene, the social and economic conditions and local history combine to create a town that will appeal to many potential students. In many ways Hastings resembles the Brighton of the 1970s before wealth rubbed the "edges" off much of it. It is certainly not the same as the current City and should not be asked to compete as an "annexe" in which Brighton University students might unwillingly or unwittingly end.

We would like to propose the setting up of a Task Force for the University, College, councils, schools, businesses, MPs and community to help develop a new approach to the future of the University. We would want to be as supportive as possible and work with the University to identify potential markets, how infrastructure might be provided and potentially work in partnership to pursue funding if this is appropriate or practicable action.

We do not believe this is a matter the Board should consider without the benefit of this co-operative approach. We hope your Board will agree to this and would like to facilitate early discussion after your meeting to take this forward. Even better would be the opportunity to present the Hastings case directly at your Board meeting and answer members' questions.

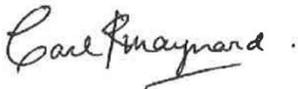
Yours sincerely,



Amber Rudd
MP for Hastings and Rye



Huw Merriman
MP for Bexhill and Battle



Carl Maynard
Leader of Rother District Council



Peter Chowney
Leader of Hastings Borough Council



Keith Glazier
Leader of East Sussex County Council



Marie Casey
Chair, Hastings Local Strategic Partnership



Steve Manwaring
Director, Hastings Voluntary Action



Graham Peters
Chair, Team East Sussex
Vice Chair & East Sussex SME Commission and
East Sussex Rural Partnership



Clive Galbraith
Chair, Hastings Chamber of Commerce

PP-

C.C.
Professor Chris Pole, Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Brighton
John Harley, Chair of Board of Governors, University of Brighton
Simon Hubbard, Director of Operational Services, Hastings Borough Council



University of Brighton

16th March 2016

Vice-Chancellor
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Dear Simon

Review of Higher Education provision in Hastings

I am writing in response to the letter from the Hastings & St Leonards Strategic Partnership of 19th February regarding our internal review of our higher education provision in Hastings.

As you are aware our review showed that whilst the current model has been successful in opening up higher education opportunities in the town, it is not sustainable. We have failed to recruit the growth in the numbers of students originally envisaged. This combined with changes in national Higher Education policy and a predicted sharp fall in the numbers of 16-17 year olds in the town and surrounding areas, means that we needed to examine the way in which we deliver Higher Education in the town.

The review considered a range of possible options in light of this evidence, ranging from continuing with the current model to complete closure, balancing social impact with cost. As a result of the review findings the University Management Board was in a position to make a clear recommendation that was endorsed by our Board of Governors last week.

As a result of this, our current model for delivering higher education in Hastings will be phased out in favour of a new University Centre that will continue to deliver higher and further education in the town in collaboration with Sussex Coast College Hastings.

Given how passionately people feel about the town and our campus it is understandable that much of the initial reaction has focused on the first part of our announcement. However, our review has also resulted in a range of constructive ideas and thoughts being brought forward by stakeholders about how, collectively, we can work to ensure a sustainable way to deliver Higher Education for Hastings.

It was always our intention to consult and engage with stakeholders and partners in the development of the University Centre. In partnership with Sussex Coast College and

Hastings Borough Council we want to create sufficient time to work with local stakeholders to hear these ideas so that these can fully inform the development of a sustainable solution that will work for Hastings.

To enable this to happen we are extending the planned implementation period for the new University Centre to three to four years. This means that I can confirm that:

- We will continue to recruit for 2016 entry to courses in Hastings as originally planned
- All courses (including those recruiting for 2016) will run for their full term at the University of Brighton in Hastings
- No students will be required to move from Hastings to complete their studies

A meeting of the Hastings and Rother Task Force will help to inform our thinking about how we can best work with the College, Council and local stakeholders to take these plans forward.

Whilst we have only just started work on the detailed design of the new University Centre I can confirm that this will involve much more than simply transferring some of our courses to the College. It will be designed to give students a true University experience and in the longer term could provide a staging-post to the development of the Council's vision for a University of Hastings.

Our ongoing support for the provision of higher education in Hastings together with our sponsorship of Academy schools and our widening participation work all demonstrate our continuing commitment to the social and economic regeneration of the town.

I hope that this helps to clarify the situation. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Chris Pole, will be leading on the Hastings Campus Review and would be happy to meet with you at the Hastings and Rother Task Force or individually to discuss our plans further.

Yours sincerely



Professor Debra Humphris
Vice-Chancellor

University of Brighton Press Release 8th March 2016

'University of Brighton will continue to support higher education in Hastings'

The University of Brighton today confirmed that it will continue to support the delivery of higher education in Hastings through an evolution of its current provision in the town.

The announcement follows an internal review which considered a wide range of possible options. The review found that:

- Whilst the current model for higher education provision has been successful in opening up higher education opportunities in the town, it is not sustainable in the longer term
- A predicted sharp fall in the number of 16-17 year olds in the town and surrounding areas mirrors a similar trend across the rest of the UK
- This is resulting in increased competition for students both nationally and internationally
- Any future investment in Hastings by the University needs to take into account not only its impact on the town and surrounding area, but also the University's wider strategic priorities, future sustainability and growth

As a result of the review the University Management Board recommended that the University should continue to support the delivery of a more focused higher education offering in the town targeting the local community. This could be delivered through a broadening and deepening of its relationship with Sussex Coast College Hastings.

This recommendation was endorsed by the University's Board of Governors who resolved that the University evolve a new model of provision in Hastings as part of its strategic development. The objective is to develop this model working with local partners, employers and Sussex Coast College Hastings.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Debra Humphris said: "I am pleased that the University of Brighton will continue to play an important role in the continuing social and economic regeneration of Hastings.

"The evolution of our higher education provision in the town, in partnership with SCCH and other partners, will provide a more sustainable basis on which to continue to build on the successes of our students and staff in Hastings over the past decade.

"There are many great examples of this revised model across the country and we will look to learn from them. I look forward to engaging with our partners, stakeholders, staff and students in Hastings as we develop and roll-out the new model for future provision."