

## Hastings Heritage Strategy December 2017

Our strategy is based on research detailing the heritage strengths of the town, its condition and how it may be protected and enhanced. Organisations and individuals who work, or have an interest, in local heritage were consulted during April to June 2017 and invited to stakeholder meetings and discussions to input into the strategy.

### Our Heritage

The heritage of Hastings encompasses the town's history from the earliest times to the present. The East and West Hills have Iron Age enclosures. Parts of the Norman castle – the only direct connection the town retains to the battle which made us internationally famous – remain. The street plan of the Old Town is mediaeval, and many mediaeval buildings remain in the Old Town.

The town began to develop as a seaside resort in the late 18th century, expanding greatly in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Much of this period's development survives, including the set-pieces of Pelham Place and Wellington Square. St Leonards on Sea emerged in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and Georgian buildings survive extensively on the seafront and around St Leonards' Gardens. The town boomed as a holiday destination in the early-mid 20th century, when the modernist seafront promenade and Marine Court were built.

The natural heritage of Hastings is exceptionally rich. Alexandra Park was opened in 1864 and was significantly improved around 15 years ago with the help of a Heritage Lottery Fund ('HLF') grant. Hastings Country Park is designated as a Special Area of Conservation and the town's natural environment designations include seven local nature reserves, three Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 21 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance and 30 locally designated wildlife sites.

There are numerous museums, archives and collections in the town, including three fully accredited under the Arts Council for England's (ACE) museum accreditation scheme: the council-run Hastings Museum and Art Gallery, the Fishermen's Museum and the Shipwreck Museum.

As well as tangible heritage, the report recognises there is also intangible or living heritage which encompasses traditions that contribute to the sense of identity and continuity of the residents of Hastings. The fishing and maritime heritage of Hastings is the best example, and the annual town torchlight procession and bonfire and Jack-in-the-Green festival are included in this category.

This strategy has been informed by work undertaken by the Drury McPherson Partnership (DMP) during 2017. Their report will be made available on the Council's website on the publication of this strategy.

### Our vision for Hastings Heritage

Our vision for Hastings heritage can be summarised as 'Hastings: a proudly independent, diverse, historic and beautiful maritime town at the heart of 1066 Country.' This vision can be articulated in four over-arching objectives to ensure that:

- the potential of Hastings' heritage to contribute to quality of life for its residents and to attract visitors is realised
- heritage is a central aspect of regeneration and urban development
- the heritage of Hastings is recognised as a priceless and irreplaceable asset
- the heritage of Hastings is conserved appropriately.

The Council's strategy is to put these objectives in to practice in all aspects of our work as far as practical and possible. We will prioritise resources and will work with our partners to maintain and improve our heritage assets.

The council is proud of the town's heritage and believes we need to achieve the right balance between maintaining our heritage and providing/encouraging the investment required to improve the town. This can be complementary, but sometimes this will be more challenging. However, it has to be recognised that the town needs to be able to adapt and address the current need for more and better housing, and issues of deprivation, and create opportunities for local jobs, as well as responding to climate change and other environmental challenges.

### **Our Heritage Achievements**

There are many significant achievements which reflect how 'heritage' is often the central feature in our ambition to regenerate the town. Highlights include:

- Jerwood Gallery and the Stade open space – the investment by the gallery, the council and other partners has transformed the former coach and lorry park, and the gallery, Stade Hall, classroom on the coast and Stade open space are now a central focus of our cultural activity.
- Townscape Heritage Initiatives – restoration of St Leonards seafront buildings, Kings Road shop fronts, Christ Church, Pelham Place, and currently in progress St Leonards Congregational Church and many other buildings. Parts of the town, including the Old Town and the Kings Road/Norman Road area of St Leonards have now achieved a new momentum where they are favourably compared to the regenerated parts of other towns.
- Hastings Pier – working with Hastings Pier Charity in the restoration of the Pier and winning the RIBA Stirling Building Prize in 2017
- White Rock Baths and its reuse as a BMX/skate park by a local business – winning an Historic England 'Heritage Angel' prize in 2017
- Alexandra Park and St Leonards Gardens – both awarded green flag status since their restoration.

We recognise the rich cultural heritage of the town and how important this is to the 'spirit' of the place. Our fishing and maritime heritage of Hastings is the best example of our spirit, which includes the annual torchlight procession and bonfire, Jack-in-the-Green May Day weekend event and many other new and emerging festivals. The large range of bodies and community groups dedicated to both promoting and protecting our heritage also reflects how well connected some local residents are with its history. The council directly funds and is engaged in the delivery of many of these cultural activities helping to raise the spirit of the town.

### **Our Future Actions**

The council will adopt the following broad actions to protect and maximise use of the town's heritage:

- We will explore external funding opportunities to improve and maintain the town's tangible and intangible heritage assets.
- We will continue to use our enforcement powers to ensure owners of heritage assets and buildings fulfil their obligations.

- We will work with private and community partners to maintain and manage heritage assets (buildings, parks and gardens, and spaces) in the town and develop and improve their sustainability.
- We will work with partners such as Historic England, East Sussex County Council, Arts Council England, the Foreshore Trust and other organisations to promote and maintain our tangible and intangible heritage.

Our significant actions in this area will be reflected in the council's corporate plan prepared and published annually.

Our heritage strategy is not a standalone document. It complements a wide range of existing council strategies and initiatives including the *Culture-Led Regeneration: A Strategy for Hastings 2016-2021*, *The White Rock Masterplan (September 2017)*; the *Hastings Town Centre and White Rock Retail and Leisure Assessment and Urban Design Analysis (2016)*; and the *Seafront Strategy 2015-2020*, which identifies key areas of heritage significance for regeneration and a series of *Conservation Area Appraisals* which are currently in preparation.