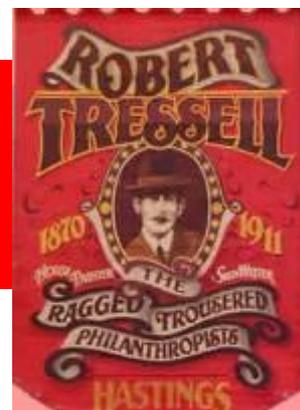


Tressell Ward councillor's report

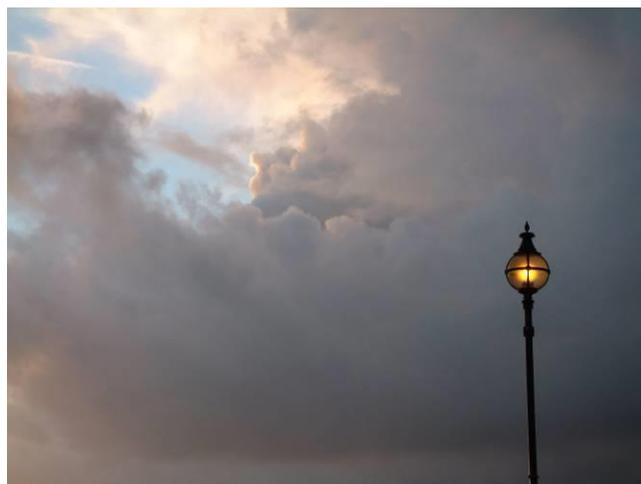
from Peter Chowney

6th March 2019



Climate Change

At its February Full Council meeting, Hastings Council unanimously agreed a landmark resolution on climate change, declaring a 'climate emergency' and committing the council to doing all it can to make Hastings carbon-neutral (in terms of CO2 emissions) by 2030. Here's the full wording of the motion, which I proposed:

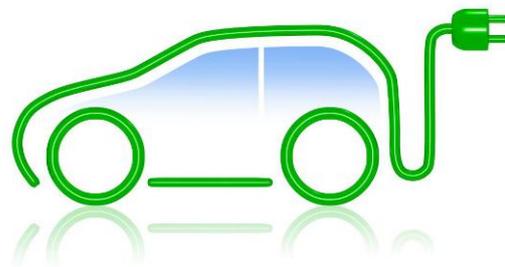


"On the 8th of October 2018 the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) warned that "rapid, far-reaching, and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society" will be required in order to limit global temperature to 1.5C above pre-industrial level and that we have only 12 years in which we can realistically accomplish this. Even half a degree above that will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, mass extinctions of animal species, and extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people. Within the current financial and regulatory framework, addressing this is primarily a matter for governments – local authorities have limited influence over the development of the local economy, transport, and human behaviour. Councils need significantly increased powers to make real change locally, and significantly greater intervention by central government to reduce climate change and reduce dependency on fossil carbon. Nevertheless, there are actions the council can take, to limit our own use of fossil carbon and encourage others to do the same, although this is limited by available resources and the scale of government cuts the council is having to cope with. Hastings Council takes this matter so seriously that we're committed to taking a lead on this and set a target for Hastings to become carbon-neutral.

To this end, we will:

- *Establish an ongoing Climate Change working group (as a panel of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee), which will scrutinise the council's policies and actions to make sure they take into account the climate change impact of everything we do;*

- *Develop a procurement policy that reduces our carbon emissions, procuring locally where possible, prioritising goods and services that are less dependent on fossil carbon, and prioritising companies who are taking steps to reduce their impact on climate change;*
- *Use whatever powers and influence we have, taking advantage of any new powers as they are made available to us by central government, to aim to make Hastings carbon-neutral by 2030, or by 2050 at the latest, aiming for the borough to become energy self-sufficient through local sustainable energy generation, and call on East Sussex County Council to adopt a parallel commitment for Hastings;*
- *Press ahead with a programme of sustainable energy generation on council-owned and other land and buildings, investigating every viable council-owned site, as well as other sites, aiming towards supplying 30% of the town's electricity by 2030;*
- *Use the current review of the Local Plan to introduce policy requirements that new buildings should meet the most rigorous possible energy efficiency standards (for example, the 'Passivhaus' standards), include electric vehicle charging points in new housing and commercial developments, minimise the impacts of climate change (for example, by making sure contribution to flooding is minimised) and include solar arrays or other sustainable energy generation wherever possible;*
- *Ensure council land is maintained in a way that maximises species diversity and mitigates species extinction;*
- *Encourage existing supermarkets to install EV charging points, lobby ESCC to take up existing government grants to install on-street EV charging points, and press for a properly co-ordinated national EV charging network;*
- *Include an evaluation of climate change implications in all reports to council committees;*
- *Build on our existing single use plastic policy by not only eliminating single use plastics in council buildings, but also at festivals and events held on council land. We will also strongly encourage local businesses to cut back on their use of SUPs;*
- *Use s.106 funding and planning conditions (and any available future powers) to continue the development of an off-road walking and cycling network as specified in the council's Local Plan;*
- *Appoint a member-level 'Climate Change Champion' to oversee the implementation of the above commitments and monitor the progress of the council's progress towards doing all it can to make Hastings a carbon-neutral town;*
- *Work with voluntary, statutory and community organisations in the borough wherever we can to achieve the above commitments;*



- *Maximise the resources the council dedicates to combatting climate change when national government restores council funding to a sustainable level.”*

Hastings Council cannot, of course, achieve this alone. We will need the support of other public and private sector organisations in the borough, especially East Sussex County Council (Labour councillors will be moving a similar motion there).

But councils are big landowners, and can contribute significantly to tackling climate change (Hastings Council owns over a quarter of the land area of Hastings). The Hastings Council Scrutiny Committee will convene a Climate Change Working Group to report back to Cabinet in six months’ time, with a proposal for how we take this forward, and work towards a carbon neutral Hastings.

Solar Arrays



As well as investigating all council-owned land for potential solar arrays, we will also be looking to install solar panels on roofs, too. We’ve already installed them on the council offices at Muriel Matters House, and the East Sussex Colleges site at Parker Road. We’re also working with Energise Sussex Coast to instal solar panels on Sandown School. Energise Sussex Coast are a

local sustainability charity, working on energy and fuel efficiency schemes. They’ve worked with the council on several projects, including the EU funded CAN and SHINE schemes, to instal solar panels and make homes more energy efficient.

There are restrictions, though, to where panels can be installed – roofs on older ‘tin shed’ commercial buildings often aren’t strong enough. The ending of the feed-in tariff by the government hasn’t helped either. For panels installed before the end of April, solar panels on roofs can be used to provide electricity to power a building, with the panel owner paid for electricity they don’t use as it’s fed back into the grid. After April, that will no longer apply – panel owners will not be able to simply feed electricity back into the grid and get repaid via a ‘feed-in tariff’. The government have been promising to come up with a replacement for the scheme, but have failed to do so. This makes small-scale installations, for example for domestic users, unviable.

What we can do however is group smaller installations together into a larger scheme, which gives enough generating capacity to sell the electricity to power providers, effectively making a group of small buildings into a power

station. We'll be looking at how we can do that, in partnership with Energise Sussex Coast, as well as approaching larger businesses to get solar arrays installed on those too, wherever possible.

Council Budget



Hastings Council agreed its 2019/20 budget at a special council meeting this month.

Local government financing is incomprehensible to most. We have a 'net budget' for 2019/20 of £13.6m. But the total council budget is far more – over £80m.

Take off what we give out as housing benefit, and that comes down to something around £30m. However, a lot of that is funded from income the council raises locally, grants from the EU and other sources for specific projects, fees and charges, rents on commercial properties, and more. The net budget is the spending we have to fund from Council Tax, our share of the business rates, New Homes Bonus and one or two other grants.

The final budget for 2019/20 is £200,000 more than it was for 2018/19, but that includes annual additional waste contract costs of around £1.5m, for the new waste contracting arrangements being introduced in June (see later article on that). There are other additional burdens too, from increased temporary accommodation costs, inflation, rateable value appeals, and a 2% pay increase. There have also been continuing government grant cuts. Back in 2010, we received over £9m in government revenue grants. That's now been reduced to zero, so we've lost well over £40m cumulatively, which has not been replaced by any other sources of government funding. These grant cuts have hit the most deprived council areas the hardest.

So with the additional spending burdens, and loss of grant, we were facing a £3m deficit for 2019/20. To cover that, we've had to reduce spending by a net £1m, involving around 15 full-time equivalent redundancies, but only one compulsory redundancy (all others were voluntary redundancies, early retirements, or redeployment into vacant posts).

Budget cuts include reducing park ranger posts, cutting grounds maintenance, reductions to the White Rock Theatre budget, reducing hours for CCTV monitoring, and playdays in the park. We have also generated an additional £300,000 from increases to various fees and charges.

But even after all that, we'll still have to take £1.7m from reserves to balance the books. That comes from the Transition Reserve the government gave us back in 2012 to help the transition to a lower-funded council, which we haven't had to touch so far – but using £1.7m means the whole reserve will be gone in one hit.

Without our commercial property purchase programme, the situation would have been far worse. Net income from commercial property rents for properties purchased over the last three years has brought in an additional £700,000, rising to around £1m with current purchases in the pipeline.

We'll also be putting up Council Tax by the maximum allowed – 2.99%. That means £265.50 p.a. Band D (a £7.69 per annum increase), or 15p a week, for the Hastings Council element of the total CT bill.

There is some 'theoretical' growth in the budget (around £300k). This is made up of two new posts to take forward the White Rock & Bohemia regeneration proposals, but these were created by re-formatting existing jobs, so are balanced by equivalent savings. We also have to spend £80,000 on Microsoft licences (the council is still using Windows 7!), and there's also a couple of new posts in legal services, which will be used to generate new income via our domestic property purchase programme, and better enforcement, with more fines for flytipping, for example.

We also have a big capital programme this year (around £20m). Part of that is to purchase equipment for the new street cleaning in-house service (this would otherwise have been paid for through a new external contract). But we'll also be making housing purchases to provide homes for rent, and emergency housing to get homeless people out of Bed & Breakfast accommodation, sustainable energy generation, and possibly more commercial property purchases.

We'll also keep applying for external grants, something Hastings Council has been very successful at - £6m in 2018 alone. These included the EU FLAG project to support the local fishery, seafront improvements, the EU CLLD project to fund employment and community development schemes in the most deprived parts of town, the EU DESTISMART scheme to investigate sustainable transport initiatives, as well as government-funded schemes to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.



However, after this year, we have not a clue what the future might hold. This year, the government will be conducting a Public Service Spending Review, as well as a 'Fair Funding Review' for local government. We don't yet know how any of that will affect the amount of money Hastings Council has from 2020/21 onwards, but we have been dismayed by the government saying that it's considering ignoring deprivation in the way it calculates how much a council needs to spend (so ignoring all the extra money a council such as Hastings has to pay to deal with homelessness, advice services, benefits administration, and much more additional spending that's needed in more

deprived areas). We need a genuinely fair way to allocate funding, not one that's biased against the most deprived areas, which have already had much bigger cuts than wealthier areas. The government's 'Reverse Robin Hood' strategy isn't going to help Hastings at all.

Waste Services Contract



At the end of June this year, the current waste services contract with Kier will end. That's four years earlier than it should have been. The reason for the contract failure was largely because the contractor had priced the contract too low, by accepting responsibility for dealing with recyclates at a time when the value of recyclates was high, using the value of the recyclates to subsidise the contract. More recently, the value of recyclates has collapsed, so the contract was no longer viable. Coupled to that, the performance of the contract, particularly for street cleaning, had been poor. So it was in everyone's best interests to end the contract.

Because of this collapse in value of recyclates, the new waste services will be significantly more expensive - about £1.5m a year more. However, this just takes the cost back up to where it was before the Kier contract started.

The waste service contract has been split into two parts. Firstly, street cleansing, bulky waste collection, and clearing flytips will be brought back in-house. So the employees in the service will work directly for the council, rather than being employed by an external contractor. We know from market testing that this is no more expensive than using an external contractor, but it does mean that we will have a lot more control over the service. The service can be much more flexible, deploying staff exactly where they're needed, when they're needed. We'll also be able to link the service more closely with enforcement, so flytips are more thoroughly investigated and fixed penalty notices (at £400) can be issued to offenders. We'll also be employing more staff than Kier did, with more traditional 'barrow' rounds. And there will be a special waste freighter dedicated entirely to emptying litter bins.

We'd have liked to bring refuse collection back in house too, but it's difficult to run that service in just one small council area, so we've let a joint contract with Rother and Wealden councils to Biffa. Waste collection is easier to run through an external contractor, as the service is much more standardised - it doesn't have the same day-to-day variations that street cleansing has. The main difference that residents will notice is that there will no longer be separate glass collections - you'll be able to put all your recyclable materials in the green bin.

Keeping a busy, tourist town such as Hastings clean throughout the year is not an easy task. But our new in-house service should make that task easier to achieve.

Bohemia Leisure and Cultural Facilities



The Council Cabinet meeting this week agreed to pay for a set of studies into the viability of a new leisure and cultural centre, as part of the White Rock and Bohemia Quarter Development. The idea is to combine a leisure centre to replace Summerfields with a multi-purpose cultural venue to replace White Rock Theatre. Combining these two ideas in one 'conjoined' venue is a new idea that has not been tried

elsewhere, so we've been able to pick a couple of external grants to help fund studies.

We know that a modern leisure centre, incorporating a good-quality swimming pool and indoor sports & fitness facilities, can be self-financing. Theatres rarely are and usually need big subsidies, but we'd be looking here at a multi-function centre that could be used as a theatre, music venue, and even a mini conference centre.

Overall, this would be part of a much larger redevelopment of White Rock Gardens and Bohemia, incorporating new pleasure gardens, new sports and leisure facilities, children's play, a new performance venue, a new outdoor events space, a new hotel, and housing. The idea is that the whole scheme would be self-financing, so the housing developments would pay for leisure and recreational facilities, based on the White Rock and Bohemia masterplan that was developed in consultation with local communities and businesses a couple of years ago. You can see that here:

<https://bit.ly/2AqwZVZ>

Overall, the cost of this new leisure and cultural centre needs to be contained within the entire development. But if we can make the new centre self-financing in its own right, so much the better.

Churchfields Incubator Units

Nothing to do with chickens ... this is about a development of new business starter units on Churchfields Industrial Estate. At the March Council Cabinet meeting, it was agreed to spend £2.8m on building 28 new business incubator units at a council-owned site in Sidney Little Road.



This is something the council has wanted to do for some time, as there's a big demand for additional business starter units. It would be similar to the council's starter units in Stirling Road, which are oversubscribed.

But the sums didn't add up – the loans to build the units

couldn't be paid from the rental income. But we've put in a bid to the Local Growth Fund (a funding scheme run by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership) for £500,000, which we're fairly confident we'll get. That would make the scheme viable. We've also put in a bid to the EU-funded 'Community Led Local Development' scheme for £250,000, which would help the development further and provide a bit more of a cushion, should the anticipated level of lettings not be met. It's estimated that the units would create around 73 new jobs.

Decisions on the grant applications are expected in spring, so construction could begin in the summer if the bids are successful.

West Marina Update

Following February's decision to advertise the bathing pool site for disposal, the Council Cabinet this month agreed to proceed with the disposal of the site to developers Countygate, but on a long lease rather than freehold (outlined in red on picture below). The terms of the lease will mean that the developer needs to get the council's consent as freeholder before they can proceed with any development, so that gives us much more control over the future of the site. They'll also pay an annual rent, until the site is developed. The lease will include terms to make sure all the ideas the developer had suggested will be included in plans for the site. So as well as housing, that would include a café and restaurant, holiday cottages, children's play, an open space, a slipway and boating facilities, artists' studios, car parking, and a hotel. The lease would also require the existing cycle route to be preserved, and that sustainable energy generation is included, with the scheme as close to

carbon neutral as possible. Parts of the site can't be developed at all, because of the stormwater tank beneath it (this would be the open space).

The statutory advertisement process invited objections to the proposed disposal, rather than the use of the site. Around 123 objections were received, along with a petition signed by 211 people. However, most of the objections were about future uses of the site, rather than the actual disposal.



The use of the site for housing and leisure development was established in the council’s Development Management Plan, agreed in 2015. This followed a two-year consultation period, culminating in an examination in public by a government planning inspector, where all objectors were invited to put their case to the EIP, before the inspector made his decision on the plan (a process that led to many changes to the draft plan). Development of the site for housing and leisure has also been in the last two Hastings Council Labour manifestos.

Now the decision has been made, I’ll be meeting Countygate to discuss what happens next. They’ll have to develop plans for their scheme, but I’ll also be expecting them to carry out extensive consultation, both in the local community, and the wider community across Hastings. I’ll also be talking to them about how they could potentially use the old Stamco site (outlined in blue) and MoD site (outlined in yellow) too. This must be a development that creates a genuine ‘destination’, attracting people from across the borough, as well as visitors to the town, generating a new leisure-based economy to regenerate the neglected western end of the seafront.

Tressell Issues



Tania Charman and I met with developers Gemselect to discuss their new proposals for the Frederick Road (road to nowhere) site. These seem a big improvement on the original plan, which was thrown out by the planning committee last year.

Most significantly, a dedicated greenway cycle route is included in the plan, following the bottom of the site more closely aligned to the route shown in the council’s Planning Strategy. The density of the housing has been reduced, with a better mix of designs and gaps in the terraces. The large prominent blocks of flats on Frederick Road have gone too, replaced by low-rise blocks at the bottom of the valley.

This is a much better scheme, in my view. The developers will be presenting the scheme to a pre-application planning forum, to be held at the council offices (Muriel Matters House) on Monday 11th March at 6pm. All are welcome – you’ll get to see the plans, and ask the developer questions, or just make your views known. After the forum, the developer will finalise their plans and submit them to the council, where they’ll be subject to consultation in the usual way on the council’s website.

And we’ll be out with our newsletters next week, this time targeting St George’s Road. You can see the newsletters we’ve delivered over the last couple of years, at:

www.tressell.org.uk/tressellnews.htm

That’ll do for now – if you’d like more information on any of this, email me at:

cllr.peter.chowney@hastings.gov.uk.

We also have a Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/tressell

And there’s the Tressell Councillors’ website at:

<http://www.tressell.org.uk>