

HEATHFIELD PARTNERSHIP TRUST LTD CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2015

Elected Members, Distinguished Guests, Fellow Directors, a very warm welcome to everyone attending this annual general meeting.

As usual we have a number of requirements and formalities to conduct in the public eye for the Trust Company and very much appreciate these being witnessed by so many interested parties. It is important that this Trust Company properly records its activities publicly and its business and its accounts are presented for approval by the People we seek to serve. It is also the appropriate time to recognize the contributions made by our strategic partners in carrying out all of our duties, almost none of the operations are conducted in isolation. The collective value in Heathfield, of collaboration across the many Parties involved in the community, towards shared objectives defines Heathfield as seemingly a one off amongst South East Market Towns and bemuses surrounding Towns especially.

That individual quality characterizes our response and enables us to be competitive against surrounding Market Towns which are all slightly larger. A total Population of 11,300 but that includes the villages of Waldron, Old Heathfield, Broad Oak, Cross in Hand and Punnett's Town. That amalgam of harmonious thinking enables us to draw on our collective strengths so much more easily.

Perhaps we are not to remain so small in comparison as WDC's new draft local plan has set aside a target of an additional 800 houses for Heathfield central and perhaps an additional 400 in surrounding villages illustrated above. That consultation is embarked upon at the beginning of next month and the Partnership's Inward Investment Committee will be responding accordingly.

This AGM report will be recorded on our web-site for the Community to have access to and together with our Annual Company Report, the report to the Charity Commission and our Annual Accounts, will ensure a transparency not afforded by many such organizations. We also run an executive, Chaired by Director Colin Williams which meets quarterly and engages with all the organizations in the Heathfield Area and conducts its business with all the appointed representatives of those bodies to ensure all projects are open to scrutiny and constructive involvement. Those committee minutes are also published publicly on www.heathfield.net, the public community Web-site.

I should not pass by without thanking Alan Staples for his immense help and guidance. As an Accountant he has gone out of his way to generously help provide auditing skills to many of the Voluntary organizations in Heathfield and we have valued his guidance. His generosity in being our "Honorary Auditor" and for being here this evening to take questions should any arise from the Public or Board is much appreciated. Alan's contribution to the wellbeing of the Town with this professional support, a philanthropic approach with more subdued fees than would otherwise be expected, should be acknowledged. I think this year especially, I will acknowledge on behalf of the Board, the collective wisdom of Alan, Tim Hough, the Honorary Treasurer and John Tolley, Company Secretary but also bringing huge experience in such matters as the trio who have reviewed the accounts and ensured their integrity before presentation here this evening.

It is important to recognize that this year we celebrate our 20th Anniversary. We calculated this moment happened in May and we have made modest statements in the press about this “happening.” I have been asked many times why we do not make more of the Partnership bit over the years I have been involved. It has struck me that the projects themselves are what matters rather than the organization. It is a good moment however to reflect on the many projects run and recognize the contributions made by so many volunteers and to appreciate the efforts made by some individuals especially. A rough calculation would assume that we have raised in excess of £2 million over those twenty years. The High Street comes in well over £1 million and the Heathfield Works! Programme already over £500,000 and there has been plenty more besides.

In May, Mr Alan Powell made his resignation to the Board as he was standing down as Principal of the College; 10 years of distinguished service in that capacity but 10 years of generous contribution to the Board. During that time the Board has expanded its operations into so many new projects and each time his wisdom and strategic thinking has been a backbone of our policy making. Caroline Barlow has kindly agreed to step into Alan’s role but only when she feels comfortable she has got a grip of her new and formidable empire. I would like to make a personal thankyou to Alan for his tremendous support and make a small presentation to him and that little ceremony will be taken later on the agenda.

At this point I will reflect on the passing in May of one of our longest serving honorary Associates of the Board, Mr Alan Mays-Smith. His patient support for the Team many times invading his house was stoic throughout and generous of spirit. No doubt Rosemary heard of his doubts or questions of direction, but publicly he was standing by us at all times. He was involved in goodness knows how many swimming pool fund raising schemes. He will be remembered throughout our Community not just as the County’s High Sherriff but for being an amiable supporter of good local initiatives. He will be much missed.

We are of course meeting here in the Community Centre this year because Goldsmith & Allcorn are no more. That of course is not true as they maintain a well-established maintenance division in the Town. We should be grateful to Trevor for his long standing generosity as we barged our way into his showroom where luckily the mobility of his stock made life easier for the sudden transformation and the lectern was always a “heath robinson” conversion of Vauxhall promotion stands. That kindness lasted for 12 years (sadly Trevor is not with us tonight as he is up in Coventry with Vauxhall management and as he puts it “when they call you go running.” I would make my appreciation of the Parish Council’s kind grant in our new homeless state to allow us use of this facility this evening. That is much appreciated.

The arrival of Waitrose was for once, not of our making, unlike Sainsbury’s which we engineered. The lasting benefit of the Sainsbury’s initiative is far greater footfall in the town and of course the setting up of Costa Coffee. That alone has increased footfall and seemingly become the social centre of the community.

Waitrose has promoted some interesting quotations, the most positive being People wanting to shop there who previously shopped in surrounding towns seeking their favourite Supermarket. That tendency has drawn an energy out of Heathfield in the past, particularly of our highest disposable income shoppers. That will bring a significant value to Heathfield Town Centre especially as the maximum 1 hour car parking regime encourages People to

move and shop elsewhere in the Town. We will see as to how that pattern works out but experienced Traders have already seen an uplift of shoppers who came in to Waitrose first before shopping elsewhere and that is really promising. The figures achieved on their first day's trading, we understand, were £31,000 income against a budget of £19,000. Sainsbury's first quarters figures were also well above budget. Perhaps unusually, it pays to underestimate Heathfield.

There is the irony that Waitrose claim that they have been trying to get into Heathfield for some time. Back when we got information that Budgens were in trouble I, using Director Chris Macklin's contacts, chased Waitrose and Sainsbury's as the stores most likely to give Heathfield an uplift. I captured Sainsbury's attention but Waitrose were not interested.

What has interested Waitrose is the increased footfall seen in Heathfield since Sainsbury's came in. The concern for the Town is that with 4 supermarkets, can we sustain all of them or will they collectively be susceptible to strain. Competition is a good thing but excess can be dangerous. Waitrose have honoured my minimum request of free car parking being maintained but the chemistry of their time limitation and minimal car parking capacity will be interesting to monitor.

Another factor in our footfall in the last year has been the Post Office, or lack of one. This is an important draw factor for any high street. We saw the effect on the Hailsham Road when the Post Office was shamefully removed by the previous Government under Gordon Brown and his Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears. She had the hypocrisy to vote with the Government on closure policy and then lead protest marches in her own community in Salford. One of the criteria of damnation then was the close proximity of the Heathfield Post Office. In December I got wind of disquiet at the Post Office and an audit that had not proved satisfactory. Quite soon after that and at the point of the New Year a new Team were installed. That seemed fine until they ran away in March.

April 1st proved the beginning of many foolish days. However by the time of the Parish Assembly on the 13th April, I had assurances from the South East Manager of Post Office Ltd, that the Post Office would be opened the following week. Subsequently we learned of leasehold problems and goodness how many complications but never quite the same story. Initially I had a confidence in the People I was speaking to. I had campaigned for three years to reinstate the Post Office in Rushlake Green and managed to pull that off, I think the only example in the Country and with satisfactorily negotiated opening times and terms and conditions. I never expected that the new incumbents there would have the bonanza of business from the fallout of the Heathfield branch to boost their introduction but that was one blessing I presuppose.

I will admit to the feeling of exhaustion as during election Purdah in the build up to May, the public's only recourse was to ring either me directly or me via the Parish Council offices. The May 7th elections produced Huw Merriman and that changed the dynamic, I now had an ally and I would publicly thank Huw for the importance he has attributed to the cause since his appointment. I would also acknowledge that since the Parish Elections, the important contribution of Parish Cllr, Andy Wooley has also strengthened the team.

We have been through the saga of the mobile temporary solution where I pushed for the only such facility in the South east to be deployed to Heathfield. I then called for Charlie

Lant the Chief Executive of Wealden District Council to help at the very point he was conducting the business of all elections (Parliamentary, District and Parish) as the Returning Officer. I was conscious of the solution we found for the temporary Mobile Library when the Library building in the High Street was being refurbished. Charlie was magnificent and asked his Director, Nigel Hannan to help. He did so and was impeccable throughout the exercise. Wealden offered any of their car parks thinking the Post Office would choose to locate where the library was located in the car park above Sainsbury's. The added advantage was the need for Broadband and that would have been found without complication immediately adjacent to the BT Station. Chasing Post Office Ltd to get their drawings into Wealden for planning took longer than imagined but Wealden fast tracked everything until the truck and crane arrived and delivered to Mill Road. Surely now we could offer a service to residents and businesses alike. A month later we discovered they could not level the Mobile cost effectively and were still waiting for BT to organize an overhead cable for broadband across the A265. The mobile having been here for a tantalizing 1 month, is now no more.

I have long secured an assurance that Post Office Ltd will restore a full service Post Office in Heathfield but Huw, Andy and I have to get a meeting with Head Office to make the next steps. That is now confirmed for the 23rd October. Rarely have I been so frustrated with the inconsistencies of statements being made by any Public or Private body. The primary dilemma is that the Post Office Ltd are public in the public's eye but private in their own.

It is here that I would like to pay compliments to the Parish Council for their Community Hub initiative. This will bring access to many public services but to be offered from the Parish Council offices in the heart of the high Street. This is an imaginative way of bringing such services to Heathfield in the first place and making them conveniently accessible to all. That in turn will improve the footfall of the Town and shops hopefully will benefit.

The Partnership entered a competition for recognition of the success of Market Towns in the Country and unusually there was a financial prize. For once we entered with gusto (with a generous testimonial from Huw Merriman) and should we have won, the funds would go towards the Hub project. It would have been a nice touch if we, the subsidiary Partnership could help the primary Partner in the Parish Council with one of their own projects. We learned on Monday that Chipping Norton, Helmsley and Colne were the finalists in the Market Town Category. A disappointing conclusion.

The spirit of cooperation is now set in practice and Heathfield continues to maximize its opportunities by working well together and where many Partnering organizations put aside egos to realize a greater good for the Town and its surrounding Parish. That is still not the case in many other Market Towns where component parties continue to be precious about their individual projects. Grant moneys remain extremely hard to secure and the best use of them is an absolute obligation. Our conduct in this arena has hopefully earned a reputation that enables our proposals, along with sound business cases, to be taken on trust. Long may that continue.

Our spirit of cooperation across the various strategic Partners in Heathfield regarding planning matters has also been fruitful. Most of the objectives sought have been agreed by the planning authority, Wealden District Council, albeit by various means of representation and persuasion. Those developments at Dream Machines and behind the Police Station are

now in motion and should realize a very positive asset, when completed, for the Town; certainly an injection of energy for our retailers.

We will be involved in the considerations being made for the new local plan. Public Consultation in Heathfield will be at the Youth Centre on Saturday the 7th of November and it will be well worth attending. There is still a need for affordable housing in Heathfield and the creation of job opportunities, attention will be sharply focused on such objectives.

One other project well worthy of mention in dispatches is the Defibrillator coverage. This concept first started by Bobby Hamilton in Waldron and then supported by Surgeon, Tim Williams, has now reached full coverage of the whole Parish. I would also mention the extraordinary efforts of Nigel McKeeman in establishing locations in the East of the Parish. Bobby's vision has been reached with qualified People dotted throughout the whole community, able to assist in an emergency. Our District Councillors also made a very helpful contribution to this overall scheme. In health matters speed is the main advantage and ambulances are at some distance from rural locations. This intervention may indeed be the vital factor in retrieving a life but also ensuring it is damage free.

This will be my 13th year in making the annual report as Chairman, into my 15th as County Councillor for the Heathfield Division and in any mind's eye already seemingly the experience of a century.

To the delight of many I am going to change the format of this report this year. I will make my apologies to those who have money on the length of the presentation (as has happened in the past) but needs must. I will endeavor to cover all the projects we are currently responsible for but to only highlight the specific developments or important implications where these apply. The question session at the end of the agenda will permit Members of the audience asking for clarification on details I have missed this time. My apologies in advance to People I should have recognized for their contribution but there are inevitable consequences in trying to abbreviate the report.

In my work as Cabinet member for the County I frequently hear of the success from onlookers of our regeneration of the Town centre. Astonished by the harmony of all the stakeholders (perhaps it is only Trevor and I who can remember the tussle we had with certain very individual retailers, seemingly now all forgotten or moved on) but perception is that it was with full consensus. In reality the consultations on all phases were important but the goodwill of all our Partners was what gave strength to the phases, 6 in all and the lasting impression when the job was completed was the transition to the amenity of the town, Summer or Winter with their various decorations and features. It was no longer the John Wayne movie set with cacti bundling down the high Street. It is my belief we saw our way through the more astringent characteristics of austerity times because of that investment and the energy it brought to our Town centre at such a critical moment in its history.

On reflection the £1 million we raised in bids from a number of different grants over what turned out to be several years was money well worth spending as the dividend is a High Street with a vibrancy that is still a draw factor to a substantial rural hinterland. Yes we have vacancies but our spies tell us not for long and with some interesting incoming investors. The fact that we set the objectives of ensuring all we did would be disabled access friendly (ahead of the disabled access act of 2004) now marks us as an outstanding attraction for

those with mobility problems and an amenity for pedestrians to roam where previously the fast running A265 throughway could trample over anyone.

The free car parking, our best asset, has been fought for many times in the last 15 years and we have our Wealden District Councilors to thank for their continued support. All Local Authorities are looking for new income streams and car parking seems to be very attractive when under pressure.

Challenges of Police provision of PCSOs being maintained as our enforcement on the double yellow lines or pavements and junctions have been made by successive Police hierarchy and we have held on through suitable representation. However the pressure on Police resources may be a valve that can no longer be contained. We need to be alert to any threat of either decriminalization or car park charges in Heathfield, it would mean the end of the "frequency and convenience" marketing of our Town. Hopefully our LATs committee that meets with our Local Police Team will make sure communication channels are open on this critical issue.

Back in the early 2000s when I was first elected, Policing was a major issue in Heathfield. We were policed from Hailsham. We eventually secured a restored Police Station and a Heathfield Police team which at one point was staffed by a Police Sargent, two Police officers and 6 PCSOs. Not surprisingly we are not able to enjoy quite such luxury these days.

Heathfield Works!

We have also been the author of our own reduction in crime levels with the introduction in 2011 of our "Heathfield Works!" project. Now 4 years on and with 160 graduates this has been one of the great Heathfield success stories. Many of the People associated with minor felonies have been transformed into responsible citizens with bright futures. A sizable distance from the young hooded People who did not get out of bed any day before late afternoon and who without any resource of their own to pay for drugs, alcohol or smokes plagued the community. The fact that 160 young People have found their self-esteem, a work place discipline and are now either in full time work or full-time education pathways with new confidence in career directions can only be Heathfield's finest hour.

It now costs us £145,000 per annum to run as we stay with our 16-24 year old graduates for a further year to ensure they are still on course or if changing can do so without recourse to the dark despondency they originated from in the first place. Professional mental support is a key factor in dealing with many of our 10 People cohorts and transport to places of employment or Colleges is the other major challenge. We have just secured some additional funding £5,000 from the Police Commissioner, Katie Bourne and she is making a formal visit to the Youth Centre in November to mark her grant. This will go towards an East Sussex County scheme "Wheels2work" where our graduates can gain access to scooters or motorbikes with full training, insurance and maintenance of the machines to enable them to gain access for their newly found jobs, apprenticeships or college courses.

I had meetings with both the outgoing Chief Executive of Tomorrow's People, Baroness Stedman-Scott and incoming, Martin Brookes, at the beginning of this month. There was common agreement on our approach for future sustainability and both I and they will be taking up joint initiatives to try and secure more funding for this admirable programme. A

visit of an appropriate Minister will be part of that plan and of course our Local MPs will be involved in that engagement. It will be interesting to note that we have so far raised £532,000 for this programme which is no mean feat on its own.

On the first of October I learned of the glorious news that Frances Conway has gone into remission for her cancer. It will take some time to calculate whether she can return to duty and in what capacity. It is timely to remember how dynamic her personality was in setting up Heathfield Works! and most especially bringing all the businesses in to participate. She was partnered by Julie Kay whose experience as Connections Officer and qualifications as Manager were impeccable and who has also been a magnificent strength to the operation through her tenure. She stood down at the beginning of the year and we were now extraordinarily dependent on Tora Bowdler to run the programme. A new Manager was hired but Frances's absence was a strain and Julie bless her, came back in consultancy fashion to bail us out. A recent very successful appointment of Lisa Crozier to the Team has enabled Tora to take on the Frances role and we have plans for another appointment to replace the now departed interim manager, Katie Roberts as well. All told it took a lot of effort to survive the turmoil of turnover and enumerable meetings with senior representatives of Tomorrow's People. We managed it with every determination and we should recognize the formidable stress and strain of managing Youths who arrive with seemingly insurmountable problems and walk out with bright futures but still a fragility that has to be managed for another year at least. You take that home with you and receive calls on mobiles at all hours of the night and it will take its toll. I might suggest that we show our appreciation of the real people that make this work, our magnificent Mentoring Team; Tora and Lisa.

Our **Transport Committee**, with suitable lobbying, have helped hold on to most of our bus services and that has been a major help to the College especially but the need to move our graduates from rural starting points to targets, frequently off bus routes or practical timetables is still important. We are now in talks with various voluntary bus providers to entangle their services with our commercial ones to provide a better comprehensive provision throughout the community.

Our fabulous "Youth Express" service was dependent on the Youth Workers at the Youth Centre working in tangent with Joanne to organize expeditions to really positive locations for rewarding events or indeed to bring Young People in from the rural surrounds into the centre for events in house has been reduced by the severe cutting back of the Youth Service. A particular disappointment has been the very recent demise of the Youth Council.

I managed to get a 6 month stay of execution since the beginning of the financial year to provide an opportunity for funding to be sourced but this has not been managed, not least because of the lack of Officers to put bids together in the first place. It was a marvelous platform for the Council to represent the needs of the Youth in the community and much good was achieved in improving relations with our Citizens living in our Old Aged housing provision. The Mary Burfield exchanges for afternoon teas or movies was a great example. The reduction in what was felt as intimidation by the elderly residents was magnificent. The constructive help towards the Skate Park and the Heathfield "clean up" days are examples of how this initiative will be sorely missed. There is the possibility, if funding could be found that ESCC could remain the employer and cover all the complications that would ensue from that development. Another impact is we have lost the editors of the Youth Web-site

and that was an expensive investment. Maybe Richard Karn, Caroline and I can look as to whether we can transfer that service into the College.

We spent the year upgrading www.heathfield.net into mechanisms that can more easily use the site. I pads and I pods and many other gismos read conventional sites in different ways and so the changing “user gadgets” had to be recognized with significant programming changes. This is now settling down with the exception of the business site categories which are being set to suit the GOOGLE categories. We should have that running smoothly shortly. It is still the most accessible provision for local information but should reach more accessibility with fine tuning of the search engines. All our legitimate traders are listed free on this search mechanism and that helps broadcast all options to potential customers within and beyond the confines of the Parish.

The other major development has been the launch of our community Social media provision. Face Book was first to be launched in May and Twitter soon after. We have the capacity to expand to other mechanisms if found appropriate. This is under the banner of “HeathfieldAbout” and the Facebook likes are tremendous and this has already made an impact on applicants for the Heathfield Works! Programme and hopefully has helped us market the Farmer’s Market as well. Please sign up as individuals. The Programme is being jointly run by the Parish Council, College, Chamber and ourselves and hopefully will promote anything possible that is positive for Heathfield.

The Farmer’s Market has been one of the primary beneficiaries of that initiative and has seen some changes this year. I reported on the need to find a person to succeed Colin as the manager of this project in my report last year. It is the oldest of the Partnership’s projects and Colin has managed it for the longest term of all. He would stay on as advisor and still run the books but the operation in the field was becoming too much. I interviewed a couple of prospective volunteers but nothing sadly came of that which was disappointing. It revealed how much we had depended on Colin for so long. The Partnership’s history of being built on volunteering was in danger which was another concern. In the end the solution came from within with Joanne volunteering to take charge and this has very successfully secured the programme and indeed it has been a wholly satisfactory transition with Colin still available for advice and guidance. The transition from one CO-OP Manager, Karl Linsdale, to the newly appointed John Miller has been smooth. Joanne spoke first to John and ensured his support would be ongoing. He would help with better signage which was also welcome. I have spoken with him since and am pleased to say that he will be helpful to Joanne as he recognizes the asset the Farmer’s Market is to him in drawing an increased traffic for his store on the third Saturday of the month.

The project committee has always been chaired by one of the stall holders, in recent times this has been David Turton, a Pig Farmer from Egypt Farm in Rushlake Green. He has now advised that he will stand down at the point of the next financial year when he will be retiring. The Board has already approved the appointment of Colin as Chairman in succession and this is very satisfactory to all concerned as it will use Colin’s expertise to maximum advantage without putting further physical strain on him. Through that arrangement there is also the stronger alliance back to the Trust Board with Colin of course, a Trustee. I would wish to acknowledge David’s significant contribution along with Erica Turton, a lamb farmer who has supported David throughout which conjures up an interesting

imagery of dialogue at the kitchen table. All have appreciated the creativity and hard work that Joanne has put into the operation.

Swimming Pool

I will start with a significant development on the Swimming Pool campaign. We were faced with a need to renew the planning permission which was expiring in June of this year. In consultation with our Architects, Saville Jones, we estimated the cost of that exercise. I then discussed the possibility of whether we could be seen to exercise the conditions required to commence the build and by doing so put the planning permission requirement to bed. Negotiations with the County Council planning department concluded with a need for the surface water survey to be completed and the site staked out. Saville Jones commissioned the survey requirements and the bill came to less than the planning renewal would have done in the first place. We have therefore been defined as having started the build.

Richard Karn who now chairs this project Team wrote to the incoming Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport and I wrote to the Minister of Sport, Tracey Crouch following remarks I heard her say in the media about our Olympic legacy from 2012. Such was the disappointment of her reply that I wrote back to her challenging the presumptions being made. Both Richard and I are having to set out our stall to find the £3.25 million with whatever resources we have. A growing national economy may help in time. We will be concentrating on the autumn statement to see if there is any further investment in sport especially swimming. Be rest-assured, the Swimming Pool remains a high objective. We have been requested by Waitrose to offer one of our projects for their public community selections and we have selected the swimming pool campaign knowing that the important feature will be continuing community awareness that this scheme is still alive and kicking.

Inward Investment

The arrival of Waitrose of course also stopped our Enterprise Centre in its tracks. We had bid for £72,000 to enable a programme of two floors of the original building to be converted into suitable units and release 22 bays for entrepreneurs to help them set up their businesses for the commercial world. We had made the business plan and secured the money. The site was available for our use and then we had a hitch with building inspection requirements which raised the costs way beyond the calculated investment.

Incubator units remain the Partnership's primary objective as a means to encourage start-up businesses to get off the ground with good marketing and financial advice and guidance. These may well have been "cooking" in back bedrooms or garages but need that next step up to maximize the opportunities that the conceiver or conceivers have envisaged. Incubator units are seen as the best mechanism to encourage employment and to join the empire of small and medium sized businesses that is the definition of the East Sussex economy.

We are now looking at finding a new site and John Tolley, Trevor Goldsmith and Richard Karn are keen to join me in finding another route to succeed. The grant money was returned in full and we will have to start again but we are resolute in our objective and by this time next year will hopefully have made new progress.

Our refurbishment of the centre of Heathfield included the concept of Town noticeboards to help promote and guide visitors to what is on offer. These lists all the retailers for example and where to find them and these Boards are located in all of the car parks. However they

have begun to age and water has got into their moving parts and so repairs are necessary. Quotes have been sought and the most important units to replace are being commissioned as I speak. Again we have had very good cooperation especially from the CO-OP and their new Manager, John Miller.

The new LED Christmas lights installed 3 years ago have survived another winter and will be checked ahead of the Christmas festival on the 10th December. The Partnership put the initial capital up for the scheme which cost £10,000 but the Parish Council have been magnificent in paying back to the Partnership in installment stages. The Festival and indeed the feature lights down the centre of the High Streets are an amalgam of the Chamber of Trade and Partnership and to the extent the edges are blurred but the unity of policy and voice are completely at one. Trevor Goldsmith and Joanne Aldous in their respective dual roles assist in enabling this to happen harmoniously.

The development of the Dream Machines site at the western gateway to the Town (which the Partnership participated in during the planning process) is now making progress and we are expecting new retailers to make their presence felt which will create better balance in the High Street. The loss of the proposed offices in the first floor is a major loss and the crumpling of principle by the District Council was disappointing. Flats in the top floor and now the first floor as well will however, create a presence in the Town during evenings when the shops are closed. That should help ensure acts of disturbance or crime are discouraged.

The Street Pastors project under the leadership of Ruth Waller is also of huge value on the streets on Friday and Saturday night. Such a success that it now flourishes in Eastbourne and Hastings as well. The Churches Together collective harmony also makes this possible. They are valuable Members of the Executive.

Heathfield events this year were concentrated on the famous Le Marche, the Heathfield Show (still the primary one day agricultural show in the Country) and the Cuckoo Fayre. The Tour de UK did not pass by in our neck of the woods this year, No whoosh factor of the peloton in dazzling neon lycra, there was no major reunification of ABBA or reincarnation of Tina Turner and no Heathfield or Wealden EXPO. However this I am told by the Chamber will be back next year. All play a part in promoting Heathfield and the Le Marche and the Show although hit by bad weather were stoically successful and we should commend all that help manage these major projects each year.

I would especially mention Richard Ridley in dispatches. Both his and his committee's work (and Gill Temple and the Twinning Society) over the year to get the Le Marche event ready for the Second August Bank Holiday Monday is heroic and I would note in these dispatches how rewarding it was to see the Heathfield and surrounding community still participating even if the rains would fall and drizzle throughout. They are made of stern stuff and we should be proud of them.

College

Very probably the most influential institution in the Community is the Community College. Three of our current Directors are Governors of the Board and when Caroline Barlow is comfortable, she will take up the post as well to follow her predecessors, Robbie Robinson and Alan Powell. It is of critical interest to give our Young the best opportunities in life in an increasingly competitive world. This year's exam results at Heathfield Community College

were outstanding and revealed the hard work put in by our Student population, their Teachers and the support Staff. The A level (A-E) results were 99% passed with 52% being A*-B results, which is the highest ever recorded. The GCSE results matched their highest recorded performance in a year when all marking was a tougher standard with 74% achieving A*-C results (including English and Maths). There is a lot of noise made about our young and yet they are recording these sorts of figures, revealing their dedication to their education and their common sense. The results now are dependent on exam performance rather than the predominance of modular evaluation and therefore these are tougher achievements all round. Even though Chair of Governors, Richard Karn is not here this evening we should acknowledge both he and Alan Powell's achievement and Alan commendably going out on a high before handing over to Caroline. Caroline started officially at the beginning of the new school year in September but spent the whole summer preparing for her role, a dedication that was not broadcast to the nation but was thoroughly appreciated from those within the School community. It suggests a continuing high standard and new vigour for improvement.

Productivity in Figures

We can report a value of productivity as being £53,630.34 for the financial year ending April 5th this year. This does not include the various gifts in kind presented to the Heathfield Works! Programme or indeed the £75,000 we secured from the County Council in their last year of contribution. That sum went straight through to Tomorrow's People. The gifts in kind would be significant as a total but far too various to account for.

The base figure is 8.7% up on last year and compares against the Service Level Agreement from the Parish Council of £10,388, a return of 516%. That is not as spectacular as some previous years but in anybody's language is still good value for public money. It actually cost us £12,407 to run with administration costs and we will have to tighten again in this coming year.

I would formally put on record the appreciation of the Parish Council in making such an annual contribution to the Partnership and hoping once again it proves a sound business investment in a charity that also serves the community to the best of its ability. The Parish Council will decide the contribution being made for the 2016-2017 financial year in their December meeting.

Once again we have provided a quarterly monitoring report of progress to the Parish Council and all of our project Committees and the Executive have Parish Council representatives.

Officer Team

We reduced our Officer support team last year and are now dependent on Sheran who is minuting this evening's meeting and also covers the Farmer's Market and LATs committees plus the Executive and Board meetings. This she does with remarkable enthusiasm and skill. Joanne has picked up the slack with the Sport & Leisure Committee, the Transport Committee as well as her longstanding responsibility for the ICT, Inward Investment and Heathfield Works! Committees' meetings.

Joanne of course edits the web-site, takes the illustrative photographs, deals with requests for the Youth Express and Community Bus usage, manages the information boards throughout the Town, prepares the many bids for funding having researched the data

required, chases Simmons for the text also Simmons again should we be doing a press release and Simmons again to cover Heathfield First articles and quarterly reports to the Finance and general purposes committee of the Parish Council. A further exasperation is sorting out meetings with Simmons's diary. Chasing Directors for their contribution to the Companies House report.

All told her patience is heroic and her calming influence on all concerned in the organization is invaluable. The presentation going on behind me is Joanne's creativity as well. Stand presentations at the Parish Assembly and other occasions are also all her initiative. She is of course the strength behind the Chamber of Trade and the Clerk to the Board of Governors at the Community College. The harmony of communication I spoke of earlier is surely down to Joanne and I would like to suggest that the whole community owe her a debit of gratitude and as someone once said on one of television's first panel games, "this round of applause." I can remember Frank Muir and Dennis Norden were on it, possibly Dennis Robinson as chairman whose catch phrase it may have been.

Directors

May I also mark my appreciation for fellow Directors, John Tolley as my deputy and Company secretary, Tim Hough as Treasurer, Trevor Goldsmith, Richard Karn, Chris Macklin, Rosemary Mays-Smith, Colin Williams and the retiring Alan Powell. Their selfless voluntary service has been both generous and magnanimous. Their strategic thinking and in many cases, formidable contributions to project management or outward representation has also been hugely appreciated. Day to day duties of examination of business plans, risk assessments, company policies, have all been meticulously considered and dealt with using their varied and comprehensive experiences.

Tim as treasurer has been fearsome in his discipline over our management of financial resources and John Tolley has also covered Company House and Charity Commission requirements with an astute accuracy and by doing so maintained our reputation throughout. I would personally thank him for his frequent examples of advice and guidance as we deal with the challenges that we encounter during the year. A sharp mind rather than a sounding board has often reduced a problem to a course of action; invaluable.

Christmas Festival

I started with events and will now promote our next batch within the short horizon. The Farmer's Market will be this coming Saturday at the COOP Car Park with 20 stalls already booked.

The format of the Christmas festival is changing this year and will run on Thursday 10th December. This year will not see the countdown to the lights on Chris Macklin's forecourt and the lights will run throughout the afternoon. The Carols will be provided this year by the Broad Oak Primary School Choir and they will perform in the centre of the Town at the Kings Church who are opening their doors for the occasion. This will be the 13th year we have promoted a Christmas Festival and the Chamber and Partnership with much support from the Parish Council have made an effort to kick start the vital retail season here in Heathfield. Thanks in particular to Trevor and Joanne who have checked all LED bulbs are operable and ready to shine and the Chamber Committee who met on Monday evening to set up some of the special events. I hope all of us try and do some of our Christmas shopping here in our Town. There is more on offer than many would presume.

Next Year's Objectives

In the coming year we would seek to build already promising relations with our two MPs. We should be furthering the build of our Swimming Pool and fitness centre project with new avenues of financial backing. We will be concentrating on finding a new venue for our Enterprise centre and bringing that objective to light. Another high objective is building stronger ties with our Youth in the community. These have been extremely strong in recent times and cuts to youth funding have caused a distance to appear. Our connections with Heathfield's very own AGE UK group grow stronger with full representation on the executive. We should also mark our appreciation of the committee lead by Mike Hepworth, having triumphantly secured a new vehicle. First class. More voluntary drivers still required.

Other committees work should stay on course with the ICT Committee seeking to promote HeathfieldAbout finding continued funding and spreading the web-site, www.heathfield.net to new audiences, the Inward Investment Committee seeking as many commercial sites within the new Wealden Development plan and rationalizing housing expansion, the Farmer's Market continuing to thrive and the LATs committee ensuring we have sufficient Policing resources. Our ongoing work to either strengthen local bus provision or make better coordinated use of current services. For Heathfield Works! It is about stabilizing the financial situation and expanding our expertise to serve growing numbers of young People in need of support. Finally having spent a gruesome year on it, getting a full service Post Office back into Heathfield.

It is worth reminding People, the Partnership is a voluntary organization bringing the community together for the benefit of its residents and businesses. If we lose that goodwill, we will have lost our purpose. One volunteer is worth a thousand dictations and there is always room for additional help. If we have ambitions of extending our 20th anniversary into the 30th and beyond, there has to be some new champions joining the Team.

Thank you for your presence this evening and your ongoing collective support.

Rupert Simmons
14 October 2015
Heathfield Community Centre