

HEATHFIELD PARTNERSHIP TRUST LTD CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

A very warm welcome to everyone who is attending this virtual Annual General Meeting. This will be a joint annual meeting of the Heathfield Partnership Trust and also Wealden Works, now an independent CIO in its own right. Both have their own accounts presented by the Auditors for public approval.

This will now be my 20th as Chairman of the Trust and the conclusion of our 28th year in our capacity as first a steering group set up by the Parish Council as an independent body capable of raising funds to invest in the Parish. This then evolved into the Partnership and later the Trust and Company limited by Guarantee. This evening will also allow for the now independent Wealden Works CIO to make its annual accountability statement. Initially a project launched by the Partnership Trust it now stands on its own feet as an independent CIO recognised by the Charity Commission. The two organisations can make their annual accounts available and be available for questions. The history of the Wealden Works project has had a profound impact on the Community and its vitality and long may that continue.

It is important to note the heavy impact the Pandemic has had in the provision of our services, and it is to be hoped that normal meetings can return to normal practice and next year's AGM can be restored to a public meeting. Regardless of the Virtual meeting the Public and Strategic Partners are able to ask questions of the Partnership and its Directors and to satisfy any enquiry. Our Annual Accounts are on parade, and these can also be examined. We have the presence of our Auditor, Mr Alan Staples and our own Treasurer, Director Tim Hough, to answer any questions about the published figures.

I would wish to acknowledge the significant help and guidance that Alan provides throughout the year and Mannington's assistance is hugely appreciated.

During our long history we have always provided public accountability in the way we conduct our business. As soon as the Covid 19 infections are alleys, we should be able to re-construct our Executive Committee where all strategic Partners are able to appoint a representative to attend and examine the detail of our projects. The minutes of these meetings are published on the www.Heathfield.net website. All project committees have a Parish Councillor on their membership to ensure an involvement of the Elected Council. We complete a report to the Finance and General Purposes Committee for their autumn meeting to ensure that can also be questioned.

As a limited Company we make an annual report to Company House and as a Registered Charity we report annually to the Charity Commission. Those disciplines are followed rigorously. This Chairman's report will be published in the www.Heathfield.net website as soon as this virtual meeting is concluded, and it is amazing how many queries we get from far and wide because of this.

It is because of these various practices that we ensure our objectives remain in harmony with those of the Parish Council and Strategic Partners. There is a consistency throughout our Policies that should give all of our Strategic Partner's confidence in our productivity.

A year ago, I welcomed County and District Councillor Bob Bowdler to the Boards of both operations. Bob had long been a huge supporter of the Wealden Works programme raising significant funds with his Music Trio. He has also taken the initiative to drive members of the cohort to interviews and appointments. His spirit has been wholeheartedly behind the project and will add a knowledge and insight into the workings of the Youth Initiative where his Cabinet portfolio will be helpful and his presence in the east of the Parish will be helpful to the LATs Committee. balance being a resident of the east of the Parish.

I would now make a brisk whistle stop tour of the numerous projects that we dealt with this last year.

Wealden Works

It is entirely appropriate that I begin with the annual statement for Wealden Works. A huge year of transition and I would quote from the Trustees Report.

'Wealden Works' employability project was established in May 2017, operating within the confines of 'The Heathfield Partnership Trust', which showed an extremely successful initial 4 years, the project had run under the auspices of the Trusts Ltd charity status. With its initial success the staff explored the opportunity of taking the next step as an independent charity and began the process of registering as a CIO during the period of Lockdown in 2020. In 2021 Wealden Works achieved the CIO status.

Since the start of the operation in 2017 Wealden Works have a contract with Skills UK, in addition in 2021 since registering as a CIO Wealden Works also won a contract with CXK and another with the DWP which was commissioned by Wealden District Council, where we have also been awarded a service level agreement. Wealden Works reputation for its success in achieving progressions of 96% of its attendees has been instrumental in its success of partnering up with larger organisations.

Wealden Works is run by a board of 6 Trustees and supported by a manager and two members of staff, all staff hold a level 3 in Education and Training and are qualified Assessors with one member holding an Internal Quality Assessor qualification.

Wealden works core objective is to work with those 16-24 year olds who are not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). Wealden Works offers 10 week courses enabling participants to gain work experience, complete business tours, receive networking opportunities in their chosen industry and complete accredited qualifications in their chosen field. The course also provides the social interaction with peers and mentors and the routine and structure that is often missing from these young people's lives.

A psychotherapist skilled in counselling young people attends the centre on a voluntary basis to offer counselling sessions to all of Wealden Works attendees on an ongoing basis and has been working closely with Wealden Works since it was established in 2017.

During each financial year Wealden Works offers its services to young people living within Wealden. There are currently 4 cohorts a year, each cohort has 30 x 4-hour sessions (120 hours) which look at both work and life skills, in addition offering work trials, mock interviews and workshops from professional outside organisations.

In 2021 Wealden Works achieved the Matrix Quality Standard for information advice and guidance service and are an accredited centre of education.

During Covid and Lockdown, Wealden works continued to run albeit it a slightly different way offering its sessions via zoom, contacts through e-mails and phone. Covid prevented any fundraising events and reduced the usual number of grant applications in this period. A total of £47,755.00 was raised during this period. With £170 being made via private donations.

Grants received in this financial year were from Blagrove, Wealden District Council, Uckfield Town Council, Heathfield and Waldron Parish Council, Horam Parish Council, Chalk Hill Trust, The National Lottery Community Fund, Sussex Community Foundation and Sussex Police Community Safety Fund.

Farmer's Market

Due to the lockdown in the early part of 2021 and ongoing negotiations with the Co-op in agreeing a new Licence, we were unable to re-start the market until June 2021. However, since then we have had an excellent attendance from both stall holders and customers. There are some new stalls and each month we receive a number of new enquiries from potential stall holders. There is a good mix of foods and produce available as well as a number of craft stalls selling all sorts of different merchandise. At the moment we are averaging 18 stalls at each market. For a long time, we have worked with Young Farmers to set up the stalls and arrange the promotional banners in and around the Town on Market Day. They have given us notice that they wish to cease the service and alternatives are being sought. It is important that we find an alternative operation to be able to maintain our longest standing programme since we came into being.

Inward Investment Committee

As a committee we have been heavily involved in making representation to Wealden District Council (the local Planning Authority) for commercial development opportunities in the town in their drafting of a new Local Plan. This plan was eventually found deficient by the inspector. We are now considering making suitable representations to the new Draft Local Plan currently being created. New housing provision (especially affordable) will also positively impact on the town centre. We also made representation to the Local Authority regarding rateable value rebates for Retailers in the Town. This was sympathetic to pressure from Online alternatives to the High Street and the Covid 19 pandemic reduction in footfall.

We are increasingly concerned about pressure being brought to bear on retail tenants in the Town who are facing undue difficulties from their landlords in maintaining their tenancy. This step by step weakens the attraction of the Town and dilute its footfall. The Mass weight of the retail offer is the Town's current strength, and any diminution is to its disadvantage.

Another threat to the future viability of the Town is the removal of its last Bank. I wrote to the Chairman of Barclays Bank in the last year on hearing about the possibility of the Bank closing its Branch in Heathfield. I had pressed on the huge advantage of being the last surviving Bank and the business this would attract. It now appears that this fell on deaf ears. We understand the Branch will close in the coming spring. This undoubtedly will be a setback for the Town and its overall prosperity. We continue to seek the opportunity of being able to create an enterprise centre able to stimulate the formation of start-up businesses and helping them grow in their early existence. Such an incubation centre would accelerate the progress from the Garage and Back Bedroom operators into the real world and assist them in their journey. Such start-up businesses are the fastest creators of new jobs and that would be healthy for the Community as a whole.

Youth Initiative

Since October 2008 the Transport Committee has run a transport service for young people in the community.

This was named as the "Youth Express" by the Youth Council in the Youth Centre and had a number of dimensions. Its main objective was to provide, for young people living in the rural hinterland of Heathfield, access to attractive activities being put on by the Youth Service and term time weekly trips were run to take youths from the Community College to Freedom Leisure Centre, Hailsham for example.

Sadly, the Youth Centre in Heathfield reduced its staffing levels and the provision for youth activities and capacity for organisation was severely cut back. The demand to access Youth Centre declined in 2013 so we currently provide one off-trips for Youth Centre members to access off-site activities, such as David Lloyd Club in Eastbourne and Chessington World of Adventures.

A new initiative by the Partnership to raise funds for the youth activities came into play in April 2019 and such activities may well be assisted by transport provision. The Covid pandemic stalled this initiative, but this is up and running again in 2022.

It has become obvious that there were not enough initiatives for the Youth in the Community. Bored teenagers hanging about in the town were an anxiety that Local People were finding difficult. The Partnership Trust worked with the Local Youth Workers to create a service offered to the Youth for activities both in the youth centre and outside the Town on expeditions. This is where Transport will be helpful. A youth Council will provide consultation of the programme. A Youth Council has been created representing most of the year groups at the College. They will operate as a consultative body as to activities to promote. A working committee made up of representatives of the Community involved in Youth together with Professionals with Youth Work qualifications is working together to set up projects of interest to all youths in the Community.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) Committee

During the year, continued programming has gone into improving and updating the website www.heathfield.net. The web-site provides a comprehensive illustration of all the Parish's activities. Its businesses, societies and its clubs. It also provides a history of the area as well as up to date developments.

We thank 21st Century for all the expertise and support contributed.

Our Facebook and Twitter accounts (both called heathfieldabout) are complimentary to the website, Facebook especially is well used. The heathfieldabout services are set up in conjunction with the Heathfield Community College, the Parish Council and the Heathfield Area Chamber of Commerce. These are vital services to the community as a whole, promoting the Town and its services to all Residents and Businesses.

Police Local Action Team (LAT)

Since the withdrawal of all local police with effect from late 2016, has raised the importance of the LATs committee in ensuring communication with the Wealden Police Inspector is maintained and all parts of the community can help in feeding useful information forward. The continuance of this service has maintained a useful exchange of views with local representatives able to report issues directly to the Inspector for action to be raised because of that meeting. In June 2021, Street Pastors completed their 14th year on Heathfield streets. Their presence in the Town has proved valuable to the more vulnerable Citizens with the youth has been constructive.

During the year the Inspector covering Wealden changed from Kendal Wells to Lauren Buck but at all times has been properly observed. This has been run each quarter and virtual meetings have still ensured a more than satisfactory communication with our Police Inspector. It ensures that all sectors of the Parish have representation and can report concerns.

Productivity

The Trust placed in the Partnership and Wealden Works is enormously satisfying. The knowledge that the investments in both each year are sound and create dividends for People of all ages in the community. The fact that the Finance and General Purposes Committee has again sought to make

similar contributions in the following financial year is of huge importance to the Trust and the CIO. We are proud of the productivity of both operations and the value of the investment being made.

Stakeholders

We would acknowledge the contributions made in the community by a varied group of organizations. The efforts of Brighter Heathfield make such a difference to the appearance and appeal of the Town. The presence of the Street Pastors is a great influence on affairs on Friday and Saturday nights. The Heathfield Community College has again distinguished itself with its exam performances. A first class effort by Richard Ridley and his Committee in putting on the Le Marche event at the end of August, a great promotion for the Town to the wider hinterland who are attracted by the French market. The efforts of the Chamber of Trade who make a lot of effort to promote retail business in the Town. The Parish Council who are surveying what more they can do, improve the experience of Residents in the Parish. There is a collective strength in our community which does a great deal to raise the spirits of the People who live and work here.

Conclusion

A reduced style of reporting particularly for the projects in hand. The Annual Report for the Partnership and this time also for Wealden Works and held virtually to ensure the safety of all attendees. Hopefully we can look forward next year to a live meeting where the presence of all interested parties adds to the occasion. The Partnership Trust is a voluntary organisation and is very dependent particularly on Directors who go out of their way to make massive contribution to the Community they serve. I would certainly wish to highlight the contribution of my Deputy, Peter Bailey, who also as Company Secretary has made a major contribution as indeed has our Honorary Treasurer, Tim Hough who moved Bank Accounts which took more than a little patience during the year. I would also acknowledge the contributions of Lisa Crozier and Tora Bowdler who have managed magnificently, they both have done a sterling job.

Looking forward we will need to ensure the High Street continues to attract customers to the Town and to keep the vitality of the Town in good measure. It will be important that Wealden Works maintains its new contracts and provides the sensational new career starts it has achieved in its history to date. We need to work with our prominent Landlords to ensure sensible and equitable tenancy agreements can be maintained. We will need to ensure the Youth Initiative really starts to make a difference and opens up new opportunities. We will need to work on the editorial of Heathfield.net to ensure it serves the community as a whole with all the information it needs.

Hopefully we will return to our normal AGM in 2023 next year. In the meantime, please seek to do as much of your Christmas Shopping here in Heathfield. I hope you all took advantage of the Promotion on the 18th November with late night shopping to maximise the beginning of the Christmas Season. especially on the late shopping day on the 18th November itself, to help promote the new season. It will make a difference to the vibrancy of the Town.

Rupert Simmons
Chairman, The Heathfield Partnership Trust Ltd

