

## **THE HEATHFIELD PARTNERSHIP TRUST LTD CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2012**

Chairman of the County Council, Cllr Chris Dowling, Elected representatives, Distinguished Guests, many representing our valued Partners and Fellow Directors. A very warm welcome to everyone attending this annual general meeting. We have a number of formalities to conduct in the public eye for the Trust Company but most important of all is the opportunity to report on all of the programmes being undertaken by the Partnership over the last year. It is also an opportunity to recognize the many Partners that are helping us in our many endeavours.

Before moving on it is a sobering thought that this time last year Cllr Peter Newnham attended as Chairman of the Parish Council and made some extremely complimentary remarks about the Partnership. That was more than generous of him since he had been a participant of so much that we do. He had been a member of the Executive Committee, The Sport & Leisure Committee, the Police Local Action Committee and the Inward Investment Committee, many times meeting at his House and in the recent year, the Heathfield Works! Committee. That is some presence, a major contribution and one that we will warmly remember.

Heathfield continues to maximize its opportunities by working well together and where many Partnering organizations put aside Empire ambitions to realize a superior conclusion to the Town and its surrounding Parish. Peter had exemplified that spirit. That very simply does not necessarily happen elsewhere in Market Towns across the South East and in times of financial hardship it makes even more sense that Tax Payers money or Grants competitively won, are put to good use with a harmony of objectivity and cooperation.

Further endeavours of cooperation, but lead by other organizations, also bring considerable credit to the Town and its surrounds, Le Marche, again a fantastic success on August Bank Holiday Monday with a draw factor from so far around. This was Parish Councillor, Mike Woodhouse's last year of many as coordinator and was sunshine itself in drizzly conditions. Gill Temple and the Twinning Association again played their part as hosts to our French Guests. The organization is in such good condition that the programme has become sustainable for many years to come. The Heathfield Show, the largest Agricultural one day Show in the Country, is again a prestigious event for the Town and its surrounds and is dependant on much cooperation from throughout the Community.

### **CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL**

I usually conclude this report by drawing attention to the Christmas Festival celebrations, this year to run on Saturday the 24<sup>th</sup> November. This is an excellent example of the efforts being made by the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary, the Parish Council and the Partnership. Our Heathfield Police Team and our Fire Service play their part, this year it is Parkside School's time to provide the much cherished Choristers that bring crowds of up to 500 to the Christmas Lights ceremony on the platform outside of Chris Macklin's Trading 4 U store. If you have not been before, there is a warmth to this charming ceremony now running for 10 years and symbolically kicking off the Christmas trading season so important to our Shop keepers. I will talk more about the Christmas lights in the Town later on the agenda. It has never really been identified as to who leads on this one and it simply does not matter other than all contribute and it is noticeable that Trevor Goldsmith, a representative of almost all the above

organizations, is central to the preparation and Joanne Aldous who coordinates for the Chamber and the Partnership is behind the scenes ensuring things are in place as expected. One other notable figure in most years has been Jack Hampton who magnificently has been master of Ceremonies. A major figure in Rotary, a Director of the Partnership, Jack has managed the ceremony with a magical touch as timings are not always easy, the microphone system frequently has been erratic but he seamlessly has put on a polished show. This evening Jack is standing down from being a Board member since December 2003. He is also taking a sabbatical from his beloved Rotary. He has been a central figure in many Town initiatives in recent years, the Town Clock, the Town Signs, the regeneration of the Town Carnival and the Swimming Pool fund raising; all great success stories. I would like to present Jack with a fine bottle of Claret as a gesture of thanks from all his Director Colleagues. I will personally miss his marketing expertise and common sense when needed in tense situations. Jack we will miss your presence in our deliberations.

This evening we also have Directors John Tolley who is both the Vice Chairman and Company Secretary, Honorary Treasurer Tim Hough, Trevor Goldsmith (also attending as Chairman of the Chamber,) Alan Powell and Colin Williams. Chris Macklin is away, Rosemary Mays-Smith is sadly absent due to a formal function involving her husband in London. She sends her apologies but her presence will be here when we make the report on the Swimming Pool project.

## **SWIMMING POOL PROJECT**

Let us start there as it has been a monumental year for the campaign to bring about an indoor Swimming Pool together with a sophisticated and modern dry leisure centre on the same site. Without a doubt this has been "Rosemary's Baby" for some considerable time. She has been the figurehead and leader but she would acknowledge many figures who have distinguished themselves en-route. In the early stages where it was lead by the Heathfield Area Pool Initiative, Bob Kearnon and Don Rigg were instrumental in the foundations. Ken Brewster from that generation has continued to be a stalwart especially when dealing with the contracted Architects, Saville-Jones.

For those attending last year, you will recognize that we had missed our challenge to have secured planning permission. We did not miss again. All the drawings were ready by the beginning of this calendar year and we proceeded to have a presentation to the public as part of a consultation exercise to inform the model we would eventually present as a planning application. Alan Powell was extremely helpful as we made several steps forward this year. The College generously hosted the public exhibition and indeed the submission was made in the name of the College. At all times Rosemary has ensured that residents living nearby the intended site would be involved in its design and provision. A representative of the Cade Street and Old Heathfield Society has always had a presence in all the committee work. That has enabled a consideration for their concerns to be taken onboard.

The Public meeting in January was heavily influential in changing the design to accommodate more off street car parking and turning points for School Buses. Changes were made and the application was considered by the County Council Planning Committee on the 20<sup>th</sup> June. The Chairman of the College's Board of Governors, Richard Karn, Mr Andrew Russell now the financial lead on the Committee and I made representations and whilst I was out of the Chamber, the Committee approved the permission unanimously remarking on how much effort the Community had put behind the project with all of its fund raising. The Parish Council had been major leads on this initiative and so many had put money in buckets or bought raffle

tickets for the prize car draw, it was ample proof of the value to the community of the project. That effort amounted to £36,650 (it could have been an extra £7,300 but the County Council underwrote the VAT). All of this funding was mostly small personal contributions from the Community College Mufti day, The Co-Op Store buckets as charity of the year and many heartfelt efforts made by so many People. It had been Jack's design but the rota allocations for raffle ticket selling had been major computer spreads. Notable was the generous volunteering of all of our Officer and Secretarial support, Joanne, Sheran and Karen come rain or shine and definitely including sleet and snow!

That re-assurance of support to the fund raising was proof that this was a facility that ultimately serves every resident of the Parish whatever age from the oldest to the youngest and I have started talking to those responsible for Public Health about possibly making a contribution. It would also allow for Heathfield as a Market Town to serve the surrounding rural hinterland and all of that population. Many steps still to go and not least raising the capital. Not much seen by the Public but a crucial stage seems also now to have been met. That is who or what organization would form the Accountable Body for the major Grant Applications. I am absolutely delighted to acknowledge that Wealden District Council, the Sport and Leisure Authority has recommend itself becoming the Accountable Body in a decision made on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October. That still needs to be approved at Full Council on the 28<sup>th</sup> November but it has already the backing of Officers and Cabinet members. I would like to publicly acknowledge the enormous help of our District Councillors, Dick Angel, Jan Dunk, Peter Newnham and Ann Newton, all Members of the working Committee at various times and perhaps most of all Nigel McKeeman who has put a new energy into the project since being elected in May 2011.

In this distinguished Olympic and Paralympic year we had one further triumph. Our project team have pursued one of the 9 Olympic Training Pools dotted throughout the Country for the 193 national teams who were represented in both games to train in when the competition was nigh. These are now being bid for as part of the legacy of the London 2012 games and we are thrilled that Heathfield has now been chosen to inherit one of these pools. Jeff Hart, the managing Director of Freedom Leisure, who has leant his professional expertise to the project Committee throughout has been the lead player in this exercise and we are extremely grateful to him for all that he has done. It is now just a small matter of raising somewhere in the region of £4 million pounds. These estimates reflect the high specification being put in place to substantially reduce the ongoing revenue costs.

We are now moving steadily towards the foundation of a Company limited by Guarantee with participation from the County Council as Land owner, The District Council as Accountable Body, the Community College as joint Partner on the project so far and the Parish Council who helped with so much of the early resources for the Feasibility Study, the Business Plan and much more. Our Board made a decision to move to a stage of investigation earlier this month. We will not be inventing anything new as this model has many similar examples being launched throughout the Country, the only novelty is that ours will be a new build. There is still a great deal of work to be done on that front and it will not be rushed until all Partners are happy with their role. We hope to have put that together by Christmas. We now have set a new target of commencing the build by June 2015. That will be a new challenge perhaps much beyond that of the High Street and Station Road regeneration. That only needed just over £1 million and took 15 years.

Much of the Partnership's raison d'être is the work to enhance the economy of the Market Town for the benefit of all the citizens that depend upon its services. This was the primary stimulus behind the regeneration project of the Town centre, our consistent championing for the maintenance of free car parking and the ever maintained increase of signage, information and promotion of all Businesses in our area. This year I will highlight just some of the activities carried out in this last year but it will be a brief summary of the many activities that we continue to undertake to market the Market Town and surrounding economy.

## **INWARD INVESTMENT**

First things first, it was magnificent to attend the Chamber's Heathfield/Wealden Expo at the Kings Church yesterday. A second year of their brilliant initiative that goes a long way to focus the region's interests on the businesses we have to offer. Once again a full take up of stands, this time even more in advance and brilliantly organized by a member of Trevor's committee, Barbara Hibbart. This is also a fine example of the King's Church involvement in the Town and they have gone out of their way to make a constructive contribution to the Town and the spirit of its Community. I understand that there was an excellent turnout throughout the day and the principle is being secured to run this again next year. I sincerely hope that all who attended, whether they were presenting or coming in of interest, enjoyed the experience and were stimulated to think about the choice of a Heathfield Business for their purchases or commissions.

At the turn of the century the Partnership had published a promotion brochure to be used by Commercial Agents and those advising the locations for inward investment into East Sussex. This was entitled "Heathfield at the Heart of Business" (I noticed it was on display yesterday on the Partnership stand) and that spirit is being maintained in the face of the most enduring severe economic climate. There is no doubt that we have the odd splutter but we are not wilting as so many surrounding Market Towns are.

The reasoning may have been testified to ironically (by Mr Shaw representing the North Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) in a recent Planning Enquiry held to consider moderations to the Development Plan which will direct Wealden's consideration for Housing and Commercial Sites until 2027. Here the Parish Council lead an initiative to challenge the Planning Inspector's ruling in February to reject a proposal being supported by Wealden District Council for 160 houses in the centre of the Town. This was very much in the hands of Parish Councillor Patrick Coffey, who although now practicing as a planning consultant gave all of his expertise and time to the cause. The value of the proposal supported as usual, this being Heathfield, by all the primary leaders, Parish, Chamber and Partnership, had many dimensions. Not least was the provision for affordable housing where Patrick Coffey ably assisted by Cllr Jean Holmwood had extensively researched the last 20 years worth of planning decisions in the Town and come up with 20 units of provision for affordable housing. They along with Patrick's former Officer Colleagues from Wealden District Council have evaluated all of the possible alternative sites within the development boundary of the Town. There was no alternative. They had also researched the housing need so often championed by Wealden District Councillor Dick Angel and proven without seeming doubt an absolute need.

Our role in supporting the Parish Council's presentation was to come up with the economic case. Here I was able to make a justification that the value to the Heathfield Economy of £15,255,440 over 6 years. With Trevor Goldsmith's input I was able to substantiate the importance to Heathfield Businesses of affordable Housing for their Employees. More than

50% of our Employees commute into the Town every day. It is worth noting that to afford a mortgage for a property in the Heathfield & Waldron Parish requires most of our working population to commute out to work to find a job with a remuneration package sufficient to maintain a mortgage in the Heathfield area. No wonder, the traffic congestion in and around the Town at commuting times. We are sadly now legendary in the County for being an unholy bottleneck. Sustainability in planning terms is one of the key criteria, I may make the prognosis that without such development, the Town, as we know it, may not be sustainable. Better to invest in its invigoration or survival now. We are surrounded by some of the most beautiful landscapes in the Country but if we do not make any headway, we will strangle and suffocate our current existence. In Monty Python terms we will be one dead Parrot.

Statistically it may surprise you to know that in the last 10 years our Population in the Parish has diminished from 11,300 to 10,938 according to the two censuses. Many of our retired singles or couples are living in large Family homes where given the option for a smaller property within their community they would be happy to downsize. That would release some capital for a more comfortable retirement and in turn provide the option for a growing Family. The alternative is the ever intensive backfill development or new blocks of flats which change the architectural character of the Town.

Legend has it that we will learn of the Inspector's decision by the 19<sup>th</sup> October. I am now expecting it will not be until early November but our fate is being sealed either way. If the decision goes against our intentions, then we will have to wait a further 3 years for another go. The pressure to maintain the prosperity of the Town will have become even more intense.

### **WWW.HEATHFIELD.NET WEBSITE**

Part of the purpose of creating the website, [www.heathfield.net](http://www.heathfield.net), was to promote the businesses of Heathfield and extended Parish. The site has become an enormous success as the all singing Community Site where journalists use it as their first point of reference for Heathfield, all age groups use it for their interests be it in Churches, Playgroups, Schools or Clubs. Our Local Police Team are prominent and illustrating their engagement in the community. The Youth Council have their own site which they design and run, where it is their expressions of interest that count. It has become the life blood of the area and now gets between 5,500 and 6,500 hits a month.

I was invited to the AGM of Age Concern Heathfield on the 9<sup>th</sup> October and it was very nice to see the acknowledgement of our carrying of their Newsletter on the site. We have continued promoting regular drivers for their excellent services either by car or van for some time and indeed Director Tim Hough on his retirement is giving his invaluable time as an example. By carrying such material we are ensuring that the site is of interest to all generations. Chairman, John Banks & Vice Chairman, Mike Hepworth, are with us here this evening and we are hopeful that they will be playing a part on the executive in the coming year. We will be doing some further work to support the Children's Centre who are responsible for 0-5s shortly as well.

The site has to be maintained as there is no point at all in a dead site. A huge credit to Joanne who has become editor in chief and a master of much modern sophisticated programming. Notwithstanding that I must pay my respect and appreciation to Nick Potter, Director of 21st Century, who has provided an extraordinary sequence of programming design and commitment to ensure our search engine trigger points and key word references are to the best of our capability. You will remember that 83.5% of the hits to our site come

through Search engines and Nick's expertise ensures we have the most up to date mechanisms in place. His personal contribution has been nothing short of inspirational. The Business site has sharpened with ordinance survey locations and many have taken the opportunity for site photographs or logos. Heathfield Businesses can now identify who has been to their site and because of that called them by telephone. We carried out a test survey earlier this year over 6 months and The Heathfield Ironmongers excelled with a record of 175 phone calls coming directly from their site visits from January to June this year. 25, 24, 28, 29, 43, 26, total 175. We are now promoting this information to businesses to ensure they keep their site which is free, up-to date and fresh and where possible take up a link to their own website for a fee of £50 per year with repeat year on year discount by 10%. Seemingly you can take a horse to water! It is hard going helping them help themselves. The small sums of income go straight back into new programming for the site.

Examples this year have been the completely revamped Youth Site and the launch of the Swimming Pool Campaign site which is very stylish indeed.

## **BROADBAND**

Directly related to the Website, our Public Information Points and our promotion of our businesses has been the championing of superfast Broadband. I have not had any doubt that the single most important investment we could possibly make in our economy is the upgrade to superfast Broadband for our Businesses and of course our Residents. In the modern world, hot desking or working from home is becoming the norm. It may yet make a substantial contribution to reducing the traffic levels in our County. In the meantime our Businesses are having to survive with minimal upload and download speeds which are derogatory in the modern world. The venture we made with the SEEDA bid some two years ago revealed how little the big boy providers in this game cared about the rural market. We documented our battles in last years report but these endeavours have ironically served us well. All of the efforts we made to justify the SEEDA case have survived to justify the early intervention in the whole of the Heathfield & Waldron Parish with a new Countywide scheme. I make no apology for trumpeting the County Council's efforts and its direct investment of in excess of £15 million in superfast provision in the rural communities of the County. Not only that but they have also succeeded in gaining Government approval and a £10.6 million contribution.

On the day of that announcement it was Heathfield Businessmen who were asked to do the pronouncements of the value of this scheme to them and their businesses. The BDUK scheme was approved in Lancashire first and second came East Sussex and all being well it will commence in early 2013. However nothing is going to be smooth with this venture and the European Commission have stalled the project due to their concerns about the UK Government putting money into what by their terms is a private Contract. The fact that most of France operates in this fashion seems to have passed them by. I have made representation to Richard Ashworth our MEP (who kindly earlier this year came to the official opening of the new Parish Council Offices) and briefed him with Katy Thomas, the lead Officer, on the text for his letter to the European Commissioner responsible for this hold-up.

All being well we will have overcome this problem, got going with the tendering process to bring the necessary contractors to the negotiating table and secured contracts to commence the installation early next year. Our other major asset is the BT mast at Cross in Hand from which most of the service should originate in this area. The Partnership and I are absolutely committed to the execution of Fibre-optic supply for those that want access in our area. Our experience (and here I refer to John Tolley and myself) has proven the value and the capacity

to continue to expand the service as and when demand decreases. We shied away from wi-fi last time and will continue to do so, as and when required. If we can get this project started in the Parish early in 2013 we will single handedly have raised the prosperity of every business in the area and most importantly raised the job prospects of our ICT literate young, dramatically.

Job prospects for the Young bring an inevitability as to which direction I am about to take. However before we get there I am going to talk very briefly about a long term objective we are seeking to launch in the next financial year. This is an Incubator unit. Entirely appropriate for the Heathfield we know today which was built around the railway station. That only came into being because of the Chicken industry in this area and getting their eggs and poultry to the London markets as quickly as possible. However the term is now used when referring to a centre for start up businesses. We are in early talks about converting 3,066 sq ft of central Heathfield Commercial space into 5 or 6 units. We would provide a central reception operation and shared meeting room to present to clients. The Start up businesses would get 3 year contracts at slightly below market price leases and with less stringent terms and conditions. They would also get access to professional marketing advice; the idea being that very small enterprises would have an advantageous start in life with which to grow into a full blown operating business. These ventures are currently to be found located in spare bedrooms or garages and the next step is always one of trepidation. If we can help the entrepreneur find his or her feet, there is no better way to create new job opportunities.

### **HEATHFIELD COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

I would now get back on track to the success story you were no doubt anticipating. I would set some perspective. I have the privilege to declare an interest at this point as I am a Governor at Broad Oak and Punnett's Town Primary Schools and also the Community College. Each of these schools have distinguished themselves with significantly improved performance over the last year. The College has been in the upper quartile of the County results for GCSE and A levels for the last decade but rose to even greater success levels this year regardless of the controversy of the English paper examination markings. Alan Powell and his Senior management Team must take extreme credit for this. Running a 1400 population school is in effect the biggest business in this area. The success of the service to the sheer volume of Students who graduate with desired exam qualifications and the satisfaction for their Families is a productivity that few businesses could achieve. The pressure, as being faced by all public services, has put a financial challenge on the expenditure available to make that service as wholesome as would be sought by the Governors. It is getting tougher to maintain the staffing for the new requirements being set by this Government of individual advice and guidance for each individual student and at what age should that be started? In September I attended a conference in Bexhill at the invitation of Heathfield MP, Greg Barker, about such matters in his Division. A whole host of Schools, Colleges and Jobcentre Plus were there but quite frankly nobody yet had the answers. The Chair of Governors Richard Karn and Alan Powell are set upon an analysis of new endeavours to provide the best advice to Students and Parents for education and career pathways. The Heathfield Businesses have offered to help where appropriate and are ready and able to contribute and part of that inclination has come from their participation in "Heathfield Works!"

### **POLICE**

At the turn of the century we had a crime problem in Heathfield, we also did not have a Heathfield Police Team, we were run as an outreach service from Hailsham. We also had the most disgruntled of Populations who would turn up in their hundreds at Public meetings to

scream their indignation about tax levels and getting nothing for their contributions. We were not the leafy affluent rural setting that our Lords and Masters had presumed. Fast forward to now and we have Sgt Ruth Hammerton and her team of 2 Police Officers and 6 PCSOs. We also have a very effective Police Local Action team, a Partnership project, where representatives of the Community meet to discuss Policing matters with our Police Team. They have successfully introduced CCTV coverage across the Town and No cold calling zones to protect the more vulnerable of our citizens from the conmen knocking at their doors. I digress but the CCTV scheme has proven a phenomenal success and many crimes have been dealt with or prevented from happening. The quality of the pictures received and the maneuverability of the cameras by the Police Team in the Station has been hugely impressive. It should also be recorded how much backing this received from the Parish Council without whom this would simply not have happened.

### **HEATHFIELD WORKS!**

Now back on track, at the time we had an extraordinary volume of minor felonies being committed by gangs of youths with nothing better to do. A massive effort was put in with investment in recreational activities by the Parish Council and the outstanding Skateboard Park was a huge sum and then its replacement another huge sum. The Youth Centre under the initiative and leadership of Beata Drury became a centre of excellence. Nobody could say, we the adult world were not doing anything for the young. However the disenfranchised grew expedientially and two years ago our intelligence registered 31 Young people who were not in education, employment or Training. Drugs, alcohol and vandalism were still a problem. The greater problem was the growing status of the gangs in our Young people's circles. The impact of our further investigation was the feeling of hopelessness being expressed by those we tracked down. Many by now had been disowned by their own Families. The term rural deprivation has in many cases been over used especially when compared to the despondency in urban conurbations in the UK. However the individual scenario is frequently even bleaker because there is little provision at all for someone completely lost or devoid of motivation in a rural location such as ours.

On September 21st we celebrated the graduation of our latest batch of Young People who had been through the "Heathfield Works!" scheme which we run in Partnership with Tomorrow's People the national employment Charity. May I say here what a privilege it has been to work with this organization, made up of people of demonstrable compassion who care deeply for the Young People we serve. This is exemplified daily by Frances Conway and Julie Kaye.

The Graduation ceremony in September marked the anniversary of its launch the previous September when 10 young People who somehow believed that we would have the wherewithal to provide them with the means for a future signed up. That was some faith on their behalf and also the few who believed in Frances Conway and myself as we sold our souls for any investment in this new venture. The first £57,000 raised, was some of the hardest selling I have ever had to make and it funded two pilot programmes for 20 young People. The fact that Frances and Julie Kaye, managed to achieve a 100% success rate with all 20 young People beset with goodness knows how many personal challenges meant that the selling of the next two sets of pilot schemes was becoming slightly easier and to my surprise the December appearance in the Observer Newspaper's charity of the year feature, raised £50,000 over the next 6 months was truly remarkable. We had struck a chord with People across the nation but not yet have we opened the Government's purses. The commitment to the young People, the compassion and yes the tough love, required to steer

them on a positive course has been the remarkable achievement of Frances and Julie. This year we added the part time contribution of Tora Bowdler who has added a major help as we guarantee that we will stay with the young Person on our 10 week course for the whole of the next year and they are multiplying fast, 40 graduates and they still need attention. Then there are those who did not get onto the programme but who still turn up for advice and guidance. Our Patron for the programme, Roger Daltry, also distinguished himself. After making a charming attendance at the July graduation ceremony where he took time out to speak with our Young people, he quietly mentioned to Frances that he might be appearing in the Olympics closing ceremony. Notwithstanding the Queen and James Bond capturing our imagination in the opening ceremony it was Roger (and he had not said that it was he and the Who) who had top billing at the closing ceremony, no doubt setting off all the fireworks as they had done in their pomp.

The commitment to the project has been magnificent from the Businesses of the area. We had taken the trouble to research the package on offer to the businesses and asked the question as to what their needs were before we started. Trevor Goldsmith and Chris Macklin played profound roles in challenging all of the problems they could see being faced with recruitment, insurance, training and management hassles. We put together a model that was as risk free to the potential employers as possible. It must be said that Employers in the Town have also contributed substantial value in gifts in kind which has reduced some of the financial strain on running the operation or introduced assets in equipment we simply could not have afforded. This needed to be a two away win for the Businesses to buy into the programme. It is quite fantastic that they are now ringing Frances to enquire about new candidates for new opportunities. We have become the job-centre we never had.

The commitment of the Parish Council from its earliest stages helped enormously. The support from the County Council has been immense and the provision of the building let alone the first major financial contribution was invaluable. The Police and especially the Chief Superintendent, Robin Smith, and Chief Inspector, Dick Coates, were fantastic in overriding reluctance in support from within their own resources. Wealden have also come to the table and are helping to fund a film which may yet enable us to convince the civil servants that are instrumental in government funding policy. Parish Councillor Bob Bowdler not daunted by the 7 minute epic seen at the beginning of the meeting is master in charge of Direction.

The current position is that we have enough funding to complete the next two schemes, that which started on the 8<sup>th</sup> October and will graduate on the 14<sup>th</sup> December and that which will start in January and complete by the end of March this financial year. Our next big challenge is to fund our way through the next three years. I had hoped that we would be in a position to announce a major funding package for that three years by the time of this AGM but that is not yet possible. We do, however, have optimistic prospects for foundation funding that will make the next three years the more achievable. The College's performance is getting better by the year but the production line keeps producing and the more so when Students leave to go on education courses that do not work out for one reason or other. Our 100% success stories may not always be achieved but they are designed to suit the needs of the individual that we are serving and not the institutions that in many cases pray on their signature. The future programme may be a job or a full time education pathway at College or back at School. It may in some cases be a combination of job and college course. It will always be tailored to the young person in question. This can sometimes be a challenge when asking what they aspire to and one answer came back, "working with Tigers." Not even wild life in general or even big cats. Tigers was it. Some element of reality is sometimes required and Plumpton College has

been his starting point. I have no doubt he will “earn his stripes,” now he has found his confidence and drive.

Much of the day to day running of the Board is ensuring the sustainability of the Charity and the viability of all the projects. This means on-going risk assessment, policy reviews and very important indeed our annual report is made to the Charity Commission and the Company House with audited accounts. Our Honorary Auditor Alan Staples has given us much sound advice through the years and makes an appearance at a Board meeting during the year to allow for questions from the Members to clarify any particular point. It would be an appropriate moment to thank him for his extremely generous advice and to recognize his contribution to the wellbeing of the Town in doing so.

## **FARMERS MARKET**

Most of the rest of our projects are extremely well run and do not cause any serious alarms. However this is not to denigrate their value as they underpin the overall programme and instill an element of stability and consistency which is much needed.

The Farmer's Market has been running now for 17 years and under Colin William's management has done remarkably well. The Market which runs on the third Saturday of the month has managed to withstand much of the downturn in the economy which other Farmer's Markets in the South East have faced. Much of this has been down to Colin's considerate and considered style which has maintained a loyalty from the Stallholders and the Heathfield Market continues to outperform its immediate rivals in productivity per customer. The Manager of the Co-Op recognizes the increased turnover each third Saturday which means increased business from people further afield coming into Heathfield for the specific purpose of coming to the Market. That extra draw factor will also be of considerable value to both the Co-Op, once parked but also the other Shopkeepers in the Town.

Trevor Goldsmith and I were invited to meet the Co-Op's National Store Manager when he was down from Manchester during the year. He came here to Goldsmith & Allcorn. What could have been ominous was he revealed immediately that he had done his homework and researched us on [www.heathfield.net](http://www.heathfield.net) and had read last year's AGM report where we had accounted for our part in persuading Sainsburys to invest in the Town. However he was complimentary of Karl Linsdale's work and especially his relationship with the Farmer's Market and the contributions of the Store Staff to the swimming Pool Campaign and had acknowledged that the Co-Op store had held their own once the Sainsburys storm had passed. It is interesting to note that both Stores have had good years. Last year we could report on our efforts to attract Sainsburys to invest in the Town. This year we have seen Costas' arrival, a prestigious Brand name but we have had nothing to do with that at all. It is however extremely rewarding to the Town that it should happen naturally and may well testify to the noticeable rise in footfall, that other potential investors may recognize as well. Back to where I started, this Saturday will be the Farmer's Market, the promotion signs are all up in the Town put up by the Young Farmers and please be there. The food products are local, fresh and flavorful having not been deep frozen on some lengthy logistics relay run.

## **TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

Talking of transport, the Transport Committee has continued very well. It pulled off another £10,000 grant mid year from the County Council to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the “Youth Express.” This has gone on to set examples of good practice throughout the rural south East in ensuring that the Youth in the Community have had access to their outstanding

Youth Site and all that Beata Drury and her Team make available. In some instances it also provides for trips out to swimming pools, bowling alleys and cinemas. From September we have introduced a charge of £1 a trip to ensure we can sustain the programme for that much longer, the County have indicated that this will be the last grant. We have indicated to both Beata and Joanne who run this programme that any student whose parents cannot afford to make the fee can still travel. We would not want to obstruct anyone for that reason. So far so good. The scheme is now available to the Heathfield Works! Programme and this may help with a group expedition. Transport for the Young people on the project to and from work placements can sometimes be the biggest challenge. However if the whole group is going to a placement as part of their induction, then it makes a lot of sense to do it by a 12/16 Seater minibus.

## **GENERAL**

The Community Group scheme has been steady as it goes with a small number of regular bookings. All of these pay a slightly reduced market price and many of the users have bus passes which is an odd contradiction especially as the committee has lobbied successfully for increased frequency of commercial services. Once again Brian Arnott of the King's Church has been the star of the year in giving an incredible amount of his time and help to both schemes. He has been wonderfully supported by Geoff Thomas especially on the community scheme and Andy Delves.

The underpinning of all of the projects we run is the base budget backing we now get exclusively from the Parish Council. That allegiance is critical and the cooperation between the Parish Council and Partnership is essential to the wellbeing of the Town. The Steering Group in 1995 was, of course, set up by the Parish Council itself. The direct accountability to the elected Councillors happens by virtue of all project committees having an elected representative on all of their working groups. The Partnership Monitoring report which is sent to all Finance and General Purpose Committee Members ahead of their meetings ensures an opportunity for questions to be raised. The publishing of all of our Executive Committee minutes on [www.heathfield.net](http://www.heathfield.net) also holds us to account.

We are a voluntary organization and can calculate an input of £54,970 in value over the last financial year. This is a recognized formula which includes gifts in kind. We have also raised £148,886 grant income in the financial year 2011-12 or £145,483 since the last AGM in grants but without the professional base structure we would not be nearly as effective. That is a total return of £203,856 from a base budget outlay of £13,875 for that year. That is a 1469.23% increase in productivity that should please the People of Heathfield and any organization who supports us. It was a mere 1438.98% last year. We do make the Tax Payer's or Grant money go a long way. We should also acknowledge that without the Parish Council behind us there would be no Partnership.

Our Team of Officers, Joanne Aldous, Sheran Crichton (both here this evening) & Karen Cook have again made generous contributions this year. Sheran takes the minutes for the Partnership Board and Executive meetings and is of course in charge this evening. She also takes the minutes for the Farmer's Market Committee, the Police LATs Committee and the Transport Committee. Karen takes the minutes for the Sport & Leisure Committee which has a greater frequency than all of the others.

Joanne apart from coordinating the whole operation covers the minutes for the ICT Committee, the Heathfield Works! Committee and the Inward Investment Committee. She

now runs [www.heathfield.net](http://www.heathfield.net) which is a crucial role in ensuring that it is alive and relevant to the citizens of the Parish. She also runs our Bus operation, operates all of our gadgetry and prepares all of our bids in immaculate formation and I am sure sighs as yet again she is having to chase Simmons for the text! or most challenging of all to get a new meeting into my diary. Her exasperation is handled so delicately that diplomacy would not be the half of it. I make no hesitation in saying that her quiet professional skill and energy has been a fundamental driving force behind the Partnership. The fact that she now also operates a similar role for the Chamber ensures even more healthy synchronization.

Each year the Partnership makes headway with as many of our Charitable objectives as we can sensibly manage. The Board take inordinate care to keep their Chairman in check as he envisages a new vision. I have been immensely impressed with the vigour with which all decisions are taken and in some cases the courage in our investment. The balance of caution and entrepreneurship is set extremely well. I would, however, take this opportunity to commend John Tolley, my deputy and Company secretary, in dispatches especially. Risk assessment is a requirement of all Boards regardless of scale and John's generosity to attend even more meetings with me to assess developments to ensure security of feasibility, contract or legal compliance has been immense. The quiet advice and guidance, the generous provision of his intellect as a sounding board, have been hugely appreciated and enhanced the teamwork of the Board in all of its endeavours.

Each year we look forward to new challenges, the Swimming Pool funding, the extension of Heathfield Works!, the possible Incubator units, the sparkle of the new Town Christmas Lights, who knows, the permission for new affordable housing and just maybe the reduction in congestion of the A265. One can still dream. Thank you for your presence this evening and your ongoing collective support.

Rupert Simmons  
Chairman  
The Heathfield Partnership Trust Ltd  
17<sup>th</sup> October 2012  
Goldsmith & Allcorn