

## Brighton West Pier Trust

### Newsletter to Members

#### 1. State of the Trust

In January 2004, there was concern about how far the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) negative decision had affected the Trust's ability to fulfil its objects and the Trust's financial capability to remain a going concern.

The current situation is that:

- 1.1 the Trust is able to pursue its objects legitimately. The intervention of English Heritage, and the emergence of a range of options which could fulfil our objects, provide a sufficient basis of justification for the role and work of the Trust.
- 1.2 The finances of the Trust are such that it can maintain its status as a going concern, and avoid trading fraudulently into 2005.

#### 2. Heritage Lottery Fund

We have maintained correspondence with the HLF indirectly (Lord Lieutenant to the Prime Minister, Sir Lindsay to the Minister for Culture) and directly. Our purposes in that correspondence have been to

- 2.1 dispute the HLF's defence of its decision (eg in its negative assessment of the external expert advice it had commissioned)
- 2.2 insist that the HLF, through its actions and inactions over the past nine years, at least shares responsibility for the circumstances which led it to take its January decision (eg if the HLF had not shifted the goalposts in 1998 the West Pier would now have been restored)
- 2.3 recognise that the decision is not reversible but to urge the HLF not to put our next application right back to the starting gate.

The outcome is that the HLF has agreed that our next application will be considered in the context of the past nine years relationship ie will not go back to square one.

#### 3 Current Project Options

- 3.1 **1875 Option** (1866 plus the extra deck widening of 1875). English Heritage is appraising this option in detail. It appears that a reconstructed 1875 pier could pay its way in terms of annual income/expenditure (income coming from the heritage centre/café in the compound area, use of the arches and events/conferences etc on the deck using dismountable marquees). However, the annual income would not
  - cover a return for capital investment ie the costs of the restoration would need to be funded from public sources (including the HLF)
  - meet the long-term maintenance costs. Those costs could be partially met from income deriving from the adjacent land designated by the Council as a contribution to the West Pier; but English Heritage is looking at sources for an endowment fund to sustain the long-term maintenance.Under this option, the proposal is that English Heritage would operate the pier but the Trust would remain the owner and steward (eg managing the endowment fund and being responsible for the maintenance).
  - On the basis of the content of past objections (eg Noble Organisation, Save Our Seafront) there should be no objections to this option
  - It leaves open the ability to complete the repair and reconstruction of the pier to its 1920's state in due course; whether that be in five, ten, twenty five years.

- 3.2 **1920's Option** This continues to be the aim of the Trust, but it would involve the HLF reverting to its previous financial commitment.

**St Modwen**, as the Trust's current private sector partners, are considering ways of adjusting its previous proposal to make it more acceptable.

- 3.3 **21<sup>st</sup> Century Option** Several ideas have been floated with me, and publicly, for 21<sup>st</sup> century uses of the West Pier (the spa pier, the eco-friendly pier) but none have financial backers or business plans. Further, since none of these ideas would restore the heritage of the pier, they fall outside the objects of the Trust.

However, firmer ideas are emerging about new major leisure developments seaward off the West Pier. Schemes in which the restored West Pier would form a heritage attraction. Development costs of £500m are talked about. Two schemes are in play; one is being floated by a local architect, who claims to have Japanese financial backers. The other is being promoted by a local development group with a successful track record. The Chairman, and English Heritage officers, as well as I have met with this group.

Clearly any such scheme is a matter for the Council (and English Heritage) rather than the Trust. The advantages to the Trust would be

- the reconstruction costs of the pier would be granted to the Trust by the developer
- the Trust would continue to own and operate the West Pier

- no significant landside enabling development would be required
- the custom attracted by the development would sustain the West Pier financially.

**4. English Heritage** Although I have had, and continue to have, discussions with all of the proposers of options, the focal point for consideration of the options is English Heritage. I remain in close consultation with English Heritage. English Heritage asked in January to be given until September to produce a report on a possible future for the West Pier. It is important to emphasise that the report will not take the form of a package agreed with the other parties (the Trust, the Council, HLF etc). At best it will outline a way forward providing each of those other parties agrees to act and contribute accordingly. At worst it could conclude that the problems are such that the thirty year struggle to save and restore the West Pier has to be called to a halt.

4.1 If the English Heritage report is positive, it will then

- 4.1.1 frustratingly, have to go through yet again the bureaucratic processes of the other parties; on the basis of past experience, that means months not weeks of time before response
- 4.1.2 require a very clear demonstration of the local support for the pier from the Trust, the Council, businesses and the general public. A major public relations and fund-raising campaign will be necessary.

4.2 If the English Heritage report is negative, the Board of the Trust will be faced with the need to take decisive action in regard to the Trust. The circumstances impacting upon the objects and finances of the Trust could compel its liquidation. Should the Trust cease to exist, the legislation on the West Pier is unclear as to which body would be obliged to assume responsibility for the pier; but it is likely to be the Council. The Council would be required to dismantle the remains of the pier at a cost of £2m-3m; in which case it would seem probable that the Council would seek a private sector firm to meet those costs in return for permission to develop the West Pier seafront.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Although I have raised a negative possibility, we must continue to press for the positive. English Heritage will not give up easily on the West Pier, and the Trust is doing everything possible to ensure a successful outcome. On three occasions in the past nine years we have come within a hair's breadth of restoring the pier; only to be frustrated by London bureaucrats and local gangsters. This time we could win.

29<sup>th</sup> July 2004

Geoff Lockwood  
Chief Executive

#### **POSTSCRIPT**

**The foregoing was written on 29<sup>th</sup> July, for the first circulation of AGM papers, on the assumption that the English Heritage report would not be available until September. The next day English Heritage made the surprise announcement that it had 'given up' on a future for the West Pier. Most members will have followed this news, and the Trust's vigorous response, in the media. If not, you can catch up by viewing our website [www.westpier.co.uk](http://www.westpier.co.uk)**

**There is no doubt that the English Heritage report is a major blow to our hopes for the future of the West Pier. However, I am not yet prepared to write off hope.**

**The availability of public monies is now dependent on the public reaction to the HLF and EH decisions. We are back in the campaigning days of 1975. Members are invited to express their views to the HLF and EH at:**

- Heritage Lottery Fund, 7 Holbein Place, London, SW1W 8NR [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk)
- English Heritage, 23 Savile Row, London, W1X 1AB  
[www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

**Further, possibilities of achieving our aims through entirely private sector funding are under urgent consideration.**

**The surprise timing of the English Heritage report could not have been worse for our necessary timing of this newsletter. Please keep viewing our website and, hopefully, we will be able to report more fully in the second circulation of papers for the AGM. The future is bleak, but do not give up hope.**

2<sup>nd</sup> August 2004

Geoff Lockwood  
Chief Executive