

West Pier Trust Newsletter – September 2003

NEWSLETTER TO MEMBERS OF THE TRUST

1. Introduction - Nothing appears to be happening – but that is not the case. We have been making steady progress since the last newsletter. Not as much as I would like, but we are on track; despite attempts to derail us.

2. Design/Development Phase There has been considerable activity over the summer. The main strands are:

2.1 Technical A 'Heritage' Group undertaking the detailed work to ensure an authentic restoration, involving St Modwen, BWPT, Halcrow, the heritage architects (BFF), BHCC and English Heritage, has been painstakingly assembling information and determining ways forward on a host of issues and choices to ensure the authenticity of the restoration.

2.2 Financial We have been examining tenders for the restoration, and they are in the same ballpark as our estimates.

2.3 Artefact Storage The West Pier compound is being extended and secured in order that artefacts stored rurally will be transferred to the compound; and sorted and labelled by the heritage architects.

2.4 Permissions Action has taken place on coastal protection orders, DEFRA licences etc but despite continuing discussions the Section 106 agreement on the BHCC planning permission has not yet been signed off. The import is not the outcome but the timing. Until the 106 has been cleared we cannot proceed with applications for subsidiary technical legal Orders. We expect objections, which could lead to a public inquiry (at which the Harbour Revision Order will also be dealt with). The timing from issuing the notice for such Orders to obtaining them is 6 months. Thus, even if the 106 is signed off now it will be spring 2004 before we achieve the Orders.

We submitted to the HLF the final report on this phase on 26th September with a view to it being considered by the HLF Trustees within the four months its officers insist on having to assess the report.

3. English Heritage Following the partial collapse and the fires, the Council took the precaution of asking English Heritage to validate our view that the damage and losses do not affect significantly the ability to achieve an authentic restoration of the West Pier.

English Heritage has been consistent in its support for the restoration since the 1970's; it has done more to achieve that end than any other body BWPT has dealt with over the past eight years, and it was its masterly assessment report in January which ensured the Council's positive decision on our planning application.

The report by English Heritage is being meticulously drafted and assessed for at least three reasons:

3.1 the shadow of the Noble Organisation looms large amongst officers in all of the public bodies we are dealing with. Those officers will not write a sentence without pondering whether it might open a door to a legal challenge

3.2 The request to EH comes at a time when 'restoration' and its meaning is high profile nationally witnessed by the BBC TV series (on which the pier featured on 9th September). Thus, our report is being used to define matters and indicates more general guidelines.

3.3 EH has decided that the report should assess every option for the future of the West Pier from demolition to full restoration.

I am confident that when the final report emerges, probably next month, it will be in our favour.

4. Noble Organisation There is still no meeting of minds between BWPT/St Modwen and the Noble Organisation; despite our best efforts.

4.1 Planning Permission. The Noble's application for a Judicial Review was rejected by the High Court but the Nobles were entitled to request a hearing before the Judge to challenge the grounds for the rejection. The hearing is set for October. We expect the rejection to be confirmed.

4.2 European Court of Justice. There remains no indication as to when the Court will hear the Nobles appeal against the European Commission's decision last year in our favour.

4.3 Harbour Revision Order. The Nobles objection is on hold pending BWPT/St Modwen's applications for other Orders so that all objections can be dealt with together, possibly, in one public inquiry.

We expect the Nobles to continue their legal challenges at every step in our progress. The outcomes will always be in our favour but the challenges could continue to frustrate our time-tabling.

5. State of Play on the Restoration My assessment of the foregoing summary of information is that our aim of restoration is reasonably secure but its timing is uncertain. We hope that the final deal will be done in time for implementation to commence in 2004 but both BWPT and St Modwen will maintain their resolve if the legal challenges are not cleared on that timescale.

6. Heritage Centre In the anticipation that the restoration deal will be concluded in the first quarter of 2004, earlier this year we commenced serious work on the Heritage Centre. The current situation is that:

6.1 The role of the centre is agreed with St Modwen. In addition to being a heritage centre it will be the unit organising the heritage activities on the pier (tours, cultural events, educational programmes etc); and probably, the information centre for the pier.

6.2 The site plan for the centre has been agreed with St Modwen and KSS ie the arches and adjacent strip of what is now the compound.

6.3 BWPT produced an outline specification for the contents of the centre which was issued to a number of firms with experience in the designing of visitor/heritage centres with a view to them putting forward their design ideas (at no cost to BWPT). Those firms will be presenting their thinking to the panel set up by the BWPT Board in the next few weeks.

6.4 The fact that BWPT will be commencing fund-raising for the centre was announced in June, and the BWPT panel will plan that fund-raising programme once we have agreed sketch design proposals for the centre.

7. Conclusion We will restore the West Pier. I appreciate fully that the delays caused by legal challenges and the impact upon our beloved pier by nature and criminal arsonists have undermined the public confidence in our ability to achieve the restoration. However, the will of BWPT/St Modwen is undiminished. Our opposition and supporters should recognise that we will fulfil the wishes of those who walked to campaign for the restoration of the West Pier in the 1970's.

Dr Geoff Lockwood
8th October 2003

General Manger's Report

The excellent weather this season has had a direct effect on the Trust's trading activities; the market had its best ever year and the re-opened Information Kiosk has been busy throughout the summer. With autumn approaching our attentions are now focussed on promoting the Restoration Ball. This is our first fund-raising ball since 2000 and will be held on Saturday 10th July 2004 at the Grand Hotel. A letter from the Chairman and a flier are attached inviting support for the event. We hope that many members will attend and are expecting it to be a very enjoyable evening.

Over the summer months AVT Ltd, a multi-media company based near the pier, helped fulfil a long held ambition of ours – to produce the Trust's own video about the pier. This first video predictably focuses on the terrible events on 2003 in the context of the pier's former glory and future restoration. It is now on sale. It lasts approximately 15 minutes and costs £10 to members (normal price £15), with all profits going to the Trust.

You will see from the attached order form that this year our Christmas Card is of a painting of the pier by Tom Wanless, which the Trust recently bought. Painted in oil during summer 2002, it is probably one of the last large paintings of the pier before its appearance changed so dramatically through the winter and spring 2003.

Many of the items sold in the Information Kiosk are available mail order, they include:

"Walking on Water" by Prof Fred Gray, the history of the West Pier £10 + £3 p&p

"The West Pier 2003" the new video £15 + £3 p&p (£10 to members)

"Murmuration" the starlings video £10 + £3 p&p

"The West Pier Underwater" video £15 + £3 p&p

Tea Towel £4 + £2 p&p

T Shirts £8 + £3 p&p

We also have 2003 Christmas Cards on sale

We also stock pens, pencils, postcards, Christmas cards and many photographs, paintings and prints of the pier. The kiosk is usually open Friday – Sunday, but can be opened by arrangement on other days.

On 19th October, as part of the first Brighton Photo Biennial, there will a car boot sale of photographers' work on the rootend decking of the pier.

Many thanks to all those members who sent me their emails for this and future mailings. This should cut costs and time and we welcome others to do likewise. Please let me know if you receive this newsletter by post as well as email – there are bound to be a few hiccups on the first attempt!

Rachel Clark
General Manger