

Brighton West Pier Trust Newsletter to Members

1. Introduction

After so many years of struggle, the West Pier site has a future to match its past. The Brighton i360 and West Pier Heritage Centre, already known simply as the Brighton Eye will set the same innovative and stylish standards of attraction, architecture and engineering as did the 1866 pier; and will meet the same social demand. It is difficult to imagine a better and more apt successor to the beloved old West Pier. Additionally, the Eye will provide a 21st century civic icon; and will greatly assist the westwards regeneration of the historic seafront.

The Trust can now concentrate on developing the exhibition content of the West Pier Heritage Centre and future plans for the sea-based pier; mixing modernity of the Eye with reconstruction to let future generations appreciate the ethos of the Victorian 'Queen of Piers'.

2. Brighton Eye

The i360 joint planning application by Marks Barfield (MBA) and the Trust was approved by the Council's Planning Committee on 11th October. The rare unanimity of the approval reflected the overwhelmingly favourable response to the Eye in the wide variety of arenas in which it had been presented since March 2006.

The application also achieved listed building consent; and was supported by English Heritage and C.A.B.E..

Planning approval and listed building consent includes the alteration works necessary to the landward end of the pier and the removal of the Concert Hall wreckage from the sea.

Further, it is now known that the planning application will not be called in by the Government; and that the Government Office for the South East has endorsed the listed building consents without adding any additional requirements.

It should be also pointed out that the Section 106 Agreement will provide the Council with an income stream for local amenities in addition to one off capital contributions to local infrastructure.

Much credit for the foregoing achievements goes to Brighton & Hove City Council and MBA for the thorough manner in which they consulted about the proposal and considered the planning application.

3. Legal

As normal, the above remains dependent upon agreeing the detail of contracts etc

- 3.1 **BWPT/MBA** The texts of the Development Agreement and draft Lease remain under consideration by the lawyers; DMH Stallard acting for the Trust. However, the main terms are agreed and we do not anticipate any major difficulty in agreeing the detail.
- 3.2 **Harbour Revision Order** Following the public inquiry in February, we know that the Inspector's report was submitted to the Department for Transport in June. Despite the continued efforts of our Parliamentary Agents, and 'enquiries' by Lord Bassam and David Lepper MP, the Department has not yet reached its decision on the HRO. It cannot take much longer, and we remain confident about the outcome.
- 3.3 **Noble Organisation** The Chairman and I have been in 'negotiation' with the owners of the Palace Pier about a possible formal agreement on non-competition. The pattern followed that in January and February when we failed to reach an agreement that would have prevented the public inquiry into the HRO. This time, we failed to prevent the objection to our planning application. We remain prepared to enter into an agreement for our site not to compete with the funfair/amusement park ethos of the Palace Pier.
- 3.4 **Charity Commission** We have kept the Commission up to date with our plans; and will need to satisfy the Commission (under Section 36 of the Charities Act) that our lease to Brighton i360 Ltd is in the best interest of our objects, through a report by an independent expert.

4. Building Works

- 4.1 **The i360** MBA plan to commence the construction works by spring 2007 with a view to completion in the second half of 2008. We are awaiting details of the works and timings.
- 4.2 **Preparatory Works and Sea Clearance** These works fall into the two parts of adaptation of the landward end of the pier to accommodate the Eye, and clearance of the wreckage on the beach and in the sea. Financially MBA will be responsible for the former and the Trust for the latter. The principal objectives of the Trust will be to
 - 4.2.1 minimise the cost of the beach and sea clearance; and relate the timing of that work to the Trust's ability to meet those costs
 - 4.2.2 maximise heritage retention and reconstruction at the landward end
 - 4.2.3 amicably terminate the leases of our tenants (Rock Shop, café, cycle hire and Regency) and assist as far as practicable in their futures
 - 4.2.4 provide office facilities to enable the management of the Trust to continue to operate
 - 4.2.5 co-operate with English Heritage, BHCC, the engineers etc in sorting out the artefacts currently held in store (and any new ones possibly recovered from the sea). The artefacts are likely to be classified into
 - those for re-use on the landward deck (serpent lamps, railings etc)
 - those to be displayed in the heritage centre (wall-mounted or lightweight movable objects)
 - valuable weather non-resistant artefacts (eg 1866 kiosks) to be placed in secure storage until re-used (eg on the sea-based pier)
 - weather resistant pieces that can be displayed on our beach (original piles etc)

- scrap for sale, some of which will have intrinsic worth (wrought iron) and some capable of conversion into saleable West Pier souvenirs.

5. West Pier Heritage Centre

- 5.1 The temporary centre in the fishing museum continues to attract interest.
 - 5.1.1 Our agreement with MBA provides for a centre on the lower esplanade level in the circulation area around the pod; and space which will also display the history of the i360. The area will necessarily be under i360 management, and the precise nature of the Trust's influence and control is being agreed. A design brief for the area has been drawn up by MBA/BWPT and three exhibition design teams are being interviewed on 30th November.

6. West Pier Market

- 6.1 The market is now generally recognised as a welcome feature of the seafront. The Trust is determined to ensure its continuance through the works period for the construction of the i360. It will not be able to continue to operate on its present site but we should be able to accommodate it flexibly within the boundaries of our site.
- 6.2 The siting of the market in the longer term again depends upon both the plans for the sea-based pier and the usage of the adjacent Council land.

7. New Pier

- 7.1 Officers have been in discussion for several months with a consortium interested in creating a pier combining modernity with heritage. Discussions were put on hold in July in order to await the outcome of the i360 planning application; and so as not to complicate the consideration of that application. Discussions will recommence in December, and MBA will be invited to join in on them.
- 7.2 Now that the Brighton Eye has been approved it will be surprising if other private sector groups do not express interest in our site.

8. Finances

- 8.1 The General Manager, with the Treasurer has taken over the **financial administration** of the Trust following the retirement of the Finance Officer.
- 8.2 Our recurrent finances are running down our reserves but at a rate which is not a cause for concern until spring 2007. We have made every effort to reduce expenditure to a minimum, and to rely on voluntary inputs. My work is in that category; so is that of our valuable Membership Secretary (Anna Kempton) and Mark James who keeps our computer system going and the web site up to date. However, certain costs cannot be avoided; for example, the cost of maintaining and insuring the required navigation buoy amount to about double our total subscription income. In particular, the Noble Organisation's forcing us into a public inquiry on the HRO pushed up the HRO bill to around £100,000.
- 8.3 We will face a very difficult financial situation from next spring; given that we will lose our rental incomes once the works start on site; given that we will be assuming funding responsibility for the sea clearance works; and given that our income from the Brighton Eye will not come on stream until 2009. We have outlined that situation to MBA, and they have indicated a willingness to find a way through that period. We will discuss that further with MBA once the HRO hurdle has been cleared.
- 8.4 Given our financial situation, any donations would be most welcome. We are enclosing material in case you can persuade friends to help.

9. Conclusion

I recall the despondency in the Board after the Heritage Lottery Fund announced the withdrawal of its support in January 2004. What a transformation we now face. The dramatic and splendid 'vertical pier' of the Brighton Eye is almost assured; and there is clear hope for a new 'horizontal pier' both reflecting the heritage of the old West Pier.

The daily task over those nearly three years of turning pessimism into optimism and failure into success has not been easy, but it has been a fulfilling test of nerve and commitment.

I regret that our finances do not allow us to produce newsletters as regularly as we would like, and used to, but we do keep our web site up to date www.westpier.co.uk.

29th November 2006

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