**WEST PIER TRUST STATEMENT 12 February 2014**

Damage from the wild weather battering southern England together with a revised proposal from Brighton and Hove City Council to bring the i360 project to fruition has focussed attention on the West Pier once again. In a recent Argus poll, 44% said they would like to see a new pier, 35% wanted the remainder of the old pier to be left to the elements and 21% want the ruins to be demolished.

It’s great that the debate is happening and it’s clear that everyone expressing a view has strong views about the pier and its contribution to the seafront and the city. It’s also important, if we are to have a realistic debate, to bear in mind a few facts. So here are some key points which we all need to be aware of.

**There is no realistic possibility of reconstructing a like for like replica of the original West Pier.**

This would be a massively expensive undertaking. The West Pier Trust has no money for this, there would be no Heritage Lottery funding available and a private developer would not be able to make it pay. The economics of piers today are vastly different from when the West Pier was a going concern.

However, the Trust is keen to retain many of the Victorian artefacts from the old pier. For example, the i360 scheme would reuse some of the old Pier’s kiosks and railings. We also want to reconstruct one of the iconic 1866 octagonal pier kiosks as a Heritage Centre and it would be good to do this to mark the 150th anniversary in 2016 of the building of the original pier. In our education work with schools we are helping to keep the spirit of the Pier alive long after the physical structure has disappeared.

**There is no long-term future for the remaining structure of the pier.**

Even if it were physically possible, there is no money available to stabilise and maintain the structure that remains. That was true before the recent damage and it remains more obviously true now. It is also not feasible actively to demolish the structure without funding from elsewhere. It has to be accepted that the visible structure will sooner or later collapse into the sea.

**Clearing of the wreckage of the old Pier can only be done using funding from a new development.**

This is a big cost because it needs divers using specialist kit. Neither the Trust nor the Council can provide the money for this. Only funding from the i360 or a new pier or both can do this.

**At the moment the i360 is the only show in town.**

There is no realistic choice between the i360 and a new pier. The i360 has planning permission, much of its funding in place and could start within months, opening in two years’ time. Nobody has a realistic plan for a new pier. Even with a viable scheme and funding to build it, it would take between five and ten years before we saw any result.

What the i360 does do is make a new pier possible in the future. The funding received by the West Pier Trust from i360 will enable it to meet its responsibilities to clear the wreckage and explore with architects and developers the opportunities for a 21st century pier. Also, extra visitors attracted by i360 will make any new pier much more viable.

The i360 will also deal with the eyesore of the root end of the pier and the arches beneath which otherwise will continue to deteriorate. The Trust simply does not have the funds to maintain the status quo let alone do the strengthening works needed.

**The i360 won’t cost the council taxpayer a penny**

Marks Barfield, the developers of i360, are putting millions of their own money into the scheme and more will be provided by the Local Enterprise Partnership. The deal being proposed by the council is using a funding mechanism encouraged by this and the last Government to lever in private investment with very little risk. This is because the council is borrowing from the Public Sector Loans Board at one rate and then lending it on at a higher rate to the development.

This kind of proposal is now being used by hundreds of councils across the country because of the unwillingness of the banks and other investors to lend. The deal would not take one penny away from the council’s increasingly restricted budget and would actually provide it with an income of over £1 million per year. This could, for example, be invested in much-needed schemes such as the urgent repair work to the seafront east of the Palace Pier, notably restoring the crumbling terraces of Madeira Drive.

**Hastings Pier is different**

Many have asked why the West Pier can’t be rebuilt using funding from the Lottery, like Hastings Pier. The reason is that the substructure of Hastings Pier survived more or less intact. The Lottery funding is to restore this. From the deck level up the structure will be new and not replicate what was there before. This is a great solution for Hastings but not relevant to the West Pier where the substructure has substantially collapsed.

**There is ambition for a new pier**

We know many people would want to see a new pier in place of the original one. There is the opportunity to design and build a pier for the 21st century as innovative as the West Pier was in 1866. It will not be straightforward to come up with a proposal which meets everyone’s aspirations, is economically viable and will be an elegant addition to the seafront. And it will not happen overnight. We are currently working on options for a new pier and will share our thoughts with all interested parties in due course. But that should not take people’s eye off achieving the i360. The i360 will make a new pier more not less likely.