



Friends Of Eastbourne Seafront News Letter

October 2022 – Number One

Dear Member,

Thank you so much for signing up and becoming a member of Friends of Eastbourne Seafront.

The last few months have been an amazing journey. Little did we know when a few of us met up at the Bandstand that bright sunny morning back in January that we would have come this far. Our small campaign to Save the Bandstand has quickly escalated and gathered pace. There are so many elements we need to focus on – the heritage buildings, the toilets, litter, sea water quality, parks and gardens, access for the disabled, provision for children – the list seems endless. We aim to work with the council to improve standards but can only do this with the support of folks like yourself. So, thank you once again for your support – together we can make a real positive difference!

Gaynor Sedgwick

(Chair)

P.S We do apologise for the time our first newsletter has taken to get out to you. We have been overwhelmed by work, but Andrew Denley has volunteered to help us out and take on the task of producing a regular newsletter for us. If you would like to volunteer your time and support and get more pro-actively involved in our work please do get in touch with karey@friendsofeastbourneseafront.org.uk

Who are we?

As you know The Friends of Eastbourne Seafront are a Not-For-Profit Limited Company which comprises like-minded individuals who want to campaign to preserve the attractions along the length of Eastbourne Seafront and fundraise to ensure improvements and new initiatives where we can.

Contrary to popular belief, we are not politically motivated, nor are we funded by any political party. However, we have been labelled as such because we have challenged some of the policies of the current council. What we want to do is to work with the council to bring their focus back onto those areas that both residents and the very many visitors to Eastbourne can enjoy for years to come.

Whilst we recognise that funding heritage assets may not always generate a huge return on investment, where money has been obtained from Government grants, (for example the LUF Bid), many of us are dismayed that our seafront and our heritage assets were not prioritised instead of other and sometimes out-of-town venues.

We need to campaign and to fundraise in order to achieve our aim of making our seafront great again – we cannot do this without your support so thank you so much for becoming a member!

What are our Successes to date?



The Bandstand: After a shock announcement in February 2022 on the Bandstand website, that it was closed for the rest of the year, the BBC arrived to film the public reaction. It was there that Gaynor, Karey and a few others met and decided to do something about it. Save the Bandstand Action group was formed. We discovered that the old Bandstand was in a far worse state of repair than anyone had imagined, and although the council had ring-fenced three million pounds for urgent repairs the previous year, this had now shrunk to a mere £750k.

When we asked why, we were given a variety of reasons, including the money had been spent on the Town Hall roof and covid! In reality, it was because the council had intended to borrow the £3 million needed but after borrowing money from the government to get themselves out of a financial hole, they were now prohibited from borrowing for anything other than repairs needed due to health and safety reasons.

The £750k is only ever going to put a sticking plaster over the decay. So, we campaigned to get the council to make the Bandstand a priority for grant funding. In April they agreed to do so and to make it and the Redoubt a focus for their bid for LUF 2 funding and asked us to work with them on it. We did. In August, a bid for nearly £30 million was submitted based around many of our ideas for repurposing and reinventing both heritage assets. The outcome of this bid should be known shortly. However as there can only be two successful bids across the whole of the UK we are aware that chances of success are limited so we will continue to campaign for the Bandstand and other seafront assets to be a priority where *relevant* funding is available.

In the meantime, we continue to closely monitor the current repair works on the Bandstand and question any apparent slippage in the schedule. We have been assured that these are on track and the Bandstand will re-open next Easter – hope to see you all there!



Other Seafront Attractions:

With the Bandstand now partially out of our sights, our attention turned to other attractions along the seafront that had been closed and were now falling into disrepair such as The Redoubt and Fort Fun, and so the Friends of Eastbourne Seafront group was born.

The Dotto: The two Dotto trains are owned by Eastbourne Council but operated by the Stagecoach company. When this popular attraction, that ferries residents and visitors from Holywell to Sovereign Harbour, failed to materialise at Eastertime of 2022, (the usual start-date), the Friends decided to find out why. After a meeting with the Operations Manager, we discovered that there was no formal contract in place to operate the train and there was also the possibility that the council were about to give Dotto to the company. Hampered by a lack of available drivers and maintenance teams Dotto



was not a priority for Stagecoach. We contacted Cllrs Robert Smart, Josh Babarinde and our MP Caroline Ansell about the situation. All of them got involved and went to talk to Stagecoach. Stagecoach agreed to start a limited service for the summer. Dotto was an outstanding success. Possibly because of the glorious summer we have enjoyed and the influx of Visitor 'staycations' the Dotto was packed most of the time. Again, the Friends approached Stagecoach, who were going to cease the service at the end of August and presented a case to keep the trains in operation until the end of September, which was accepted and was successful. The Friends maintain a good working relationship with Stagecoach and will be encouraging them to run extended seasons and specials – with an exciting project proposal currently being put to the council. Watch this space!

Fort Fun: This hugely popular venue for families and children throughout the year closed its doors when Covid took hold. Without routine maintenance the site rapidly fell into disrepair. Vandals then sealed its fate, and all appeared bleak.

This is a prime seafront site and people were concerned that it would be cleared for redevelopment into apartments. The council denied this and put out an invitation for expressions of interest for the site.

However, further digging by the Friends resulted in the knowledge that this had only been advertised on the Council website and Facebook! We challenged the Council on this policy – this was a prime seafront site that could have attracted a national operator with a proven record of success. Inexplicably the council then suspended the process saying that new information from the Environment Agency would allow them to offer a longer lease and so they would now be advertising nationally. The Environment Agency denied they had provided any new information and the site was never advertised nationally.

We then discovered a local, well established, attraction operator had expressed an interest in the site offering to invest millions. However, they had been put off when the council refused anything more than a 5-year lease and would not negotiate regarding the car park linked to the site. The council has denied all of this and the leader of the council, David Tutt, has now been quoted in the papers as saying there will be a 25-year lease available. The current bidding process is now ending with a small number of groups being asked to present to the council in the near future with a winner then being announced.

The whole bidding process has been questionable and haphazard. Some of those who submitted bids only found out their bids would not meet unwritten council criteria through *our* Facebook page, others found out that they had not reached the final line-up through *our* Facebook page and so many community groups have been strung along for months with their hopes raised and dashed.



The council proudly announced that part of Fort Fun would be partially open from September after Wingrove House, (a hotel in Alfriston), were given a short 3-month contract to do so. It has remained closed although Wingrove House workers have been working busily on the site.

We await the outcome and hope that Councillor Robert Smart will be able to divulge more information when he presents on the subject at our members meeting on 1st November.

The Redoubt: This once proud historic building has been sadly falling into disrepair for several years. Closed to visitors for reasons that the Friends have been unable to ascertain. When challenged the Council repeatedly advise us that it is because of Health and Safety reasons, that it is unsafe, that the electrics need upgrading. However, no formal report as to its current condition has been forthcoming even after a Freedom of Information submission. We know that the colonnades have been unsafe for a long time but why should this close the Redoubt to visitors? The Friends campaigned and contacted the Council with a plan to clear the Redoubt of weeds and debris and to even open and manage the site using our volunteers. This plan was rejected but in recent weeks we find that some money has been allocated to demolish an unsafe tearoom on the site and to clear out the moat. We understand too that the colonnades will also be demolished. Will the Redoubt re-open? We hope so and we will continue to work with the Council to see what can be done about this.

Our Pocket Size Seafront Guide: In September we produced a pocket guide to the seafront – Holywell to the Harbour – The Highlights. It described all the incredible features residents and visitors can enjoy as they walk along our wonderful promenade. We put the content together and the wonderful Amanda Ripley who designed our logo offered to take on the design aspect – and wow did she produce an amazing result. On Saturday 3rd of September we set up a stall on the seafront distributing copies to the public for free – with the wonderful Wanda Kent and her group Vocalise performing popular songs and giving the whole event a carnival atmosphere. The event was an amazing success. The booklet has been incredibly popular with a number of Bed and Breakfasts requesting supplies for their guests who have proclaimed them a really useful resource. If you have not yet had a copy please do contact karey@friendsofeastbourneseafront.org.uk or drop into Mr Gifts' Emporium, Bobsters or Sunbean Café in Victoria Place and pick up a copy.

A Seafront Strategy: Unlike almost every other seaside resort we can think of Eastbourne stands alone in **not** having a seafront strategy. The Friends again challenged this lack of policy and produced a detailed paper of ideas on how the seafront could be rejuvenated and made profitable again. After our campaigning, a council cabinet role was created in order to do this and address the issues along the seafront. Unfortunately the first incumbent resigned after just a few weeks. The Friends are establishing a good relationship with her replacement, Cllr Swansborough, and hope that he will work with us and other seafront related groups to devise and initiate a Seafront Strategy that Eastbourne can be proud of.

The Coastal Defence Project: This project is expected to run for at least one hundred years and will seek to defend properties on the coast from Holywell in the West to Cooden Beach in the East. The Agencies currently in the proposal planning stage and this expected to last until 2025/26 at which point their plans will be submitted for funding from the Government. The Agency is keen to work with groups and schools to gather feedback.

The Friends have had several meetings with the Environment Agency regarding the proposed long-term coastal defence project who have stated they regard us as important stakeholders.

Under the project terms, there is no funding allowed for the direct protection of any heritage assets. However, since the Bandstand and the Redoubt are on the shoreline then, almost by default, they will be within the protection zone for homes and businesses behind. At the meeting on the 19th of October, Tim Whelan, and Tim Bartlett, (EBC Director of Services and EBC Specialist Advisor – respectively), gave very detailed and enlightening explanations of the Sea Defences as currently managed by the Council.



Social Media: Our Facebook groups Save Eastbourne Bandstand and Friends of Eastbourne Seafront have amassed over 1300 members between them. Thanks to the lovely Kelly Ancell who has volunteered to take on our social media we now also have a Twitter account **@FriendsEBNSea** and an Instagram account **friends_of_eastbourne_seafront**. Please do follow us – big numbers sends a strong message to those in power!

Eastbourne Seafront Heritage Action Group: There are many community groups involved with Eastbourne seafront; Individuals and small groups campaigning and challenging for improvements: From the Parks and Gardens to the seafront lighting, to ensuring that new builds are in keeping with our town, to challenging the Water Companies to keep our seas clean and safe. In response, the Friends have initiated the **Eastbourne Seafront Heritage Action Group**. The aim of this group is to work together on key issues as we believe that together we can harness greater strength of feeling and public support.

What's next? The Friends do not just want to be a voice of contention challenging policies which damage our seafront. We want to make a positive contribution. We have a vision for the seafront as a vibrant, bustling place that is accessible to all and appeals to all ages. To that end we are trying to get a number of projects off the ground. We are in talks with Stagecoach and the council over a possible Dotto special, we are discussing the possibility of us fundraising for a children's bike track on a seafront space and we have put forward the idea of a Welcome Team of our volunteers to operate along the seafront.

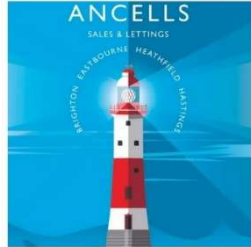
Want to hear more? Do come to our meeting at Eastbourne Society for the Blind on Tuesday November 1st at 7pm.



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We need new members and business sponsors to keep our campaigns going, so we thank, again, all our members and the following Business Sponsors:

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