

Hastings Pier Charity

Short description of the project

Ownership of the pier has been a contentious issue with a succession of private companies failing to generate and re-invest surpluses to maintain the town's iconic asset. The business model adopted by Hastings Pier Charity will re-invest all profits in the Pier's maintenance. Creation of a 'People's Pier', owned by local residents and businesses is central to the vision and so the group was keen to offer a community share scheme.

Rather than dissolving the Charity and setting up a new legal entity, Hastings Pier Charity negotiated with the Charity Commission to transition from a Charity and Company Limited by Guarantee, to a Community Benefit Society (Becom). A Becom is a form of Industrial and Provident Society with exempt Charity status (the first organisation to make such a transition following the Charities Act 2011). The community share scheme closed in Spring 2014 and has raised over £550,000 and created 3,000 shareholders. This has bridged the funding gap, generated working capital and most importantly has created a broad base of active members.



The shell of Hastings Pier © James Davies, English Heritage

What would have happened without this project?

Hastings Pier had suffered from years of private under-investment and damage from fire before it was rescued by Hastings Pier and White Rock Trust. This situation may have continued to the point at which the pier became unusable and unviable to repair.

What has the project achieved, or difference has it made?

Hastings Pier and White Rock Trust (HPWRT) undertook considerable work initially to put the project on the political map and secure the support of local MPs. The group was able to convince Hastings Borough Council to make a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) and sell the Pier immediately afterwards for £1 to the Hastings Pier Charity, a new charitable organisation set up to take ownership.



Work begins on the Pier © James Davies, English Heritage

What is the future of the project?

The CEO of Hastings Pier Charity, Simon Opie, believes a key to the project's success has been to stay flexible and re-engineer the plan to respond to changing circumstances. Connecting into group wisdom has also been crucial with the group receiving support from many organisations including the Community Shares Unit, Locality and Co-operatives UK. Seeking advice from groups that are on similar journeys, such as 'FC United' in Manchester, has provided the group with the inspiration to keep going, knowing that they are not alone in breaking new ground.

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