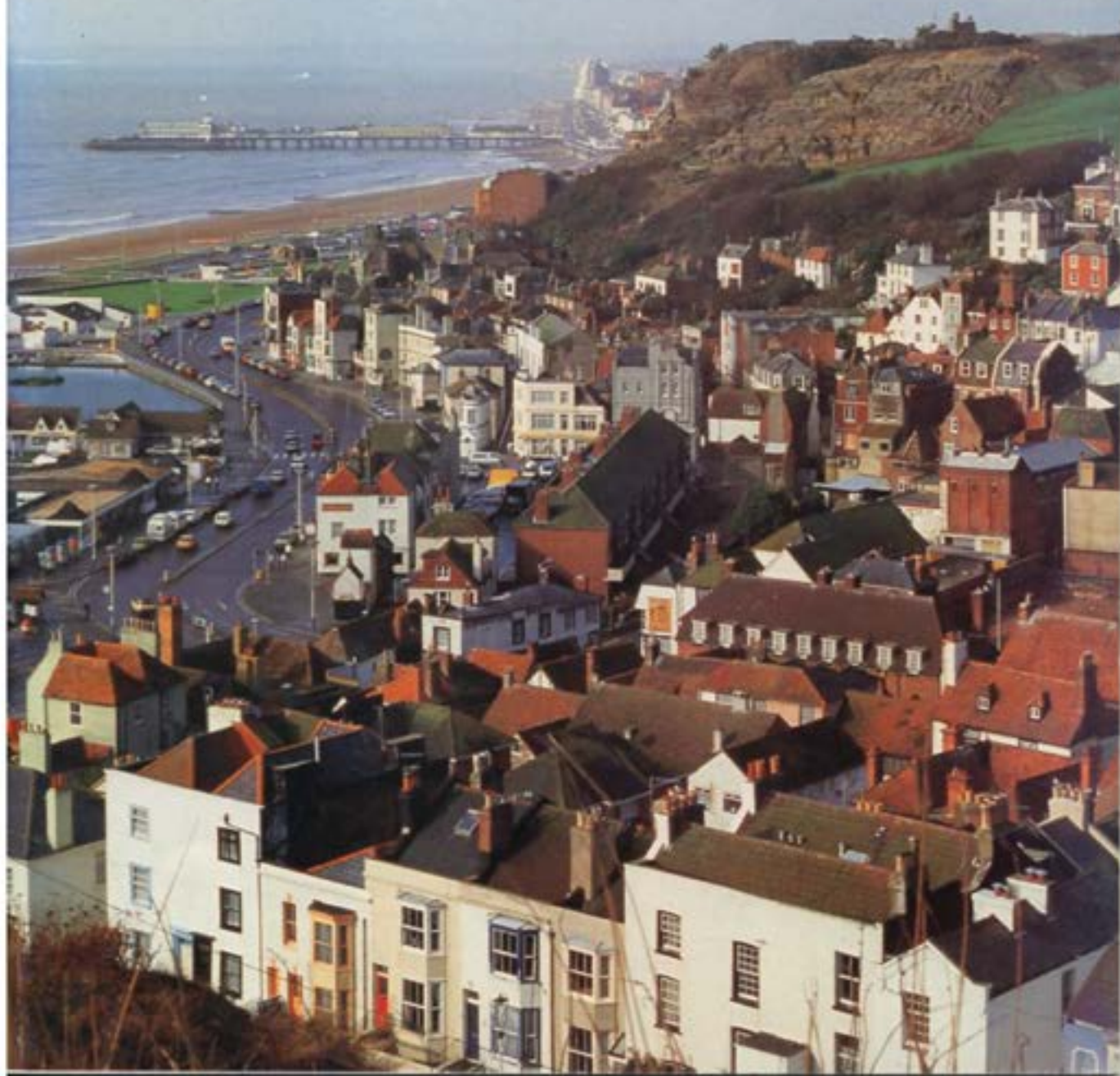


Hastings Urban Conservation Project

Mid Term Review 1986 ~ 1988



Cover: The view over Old Town Hastings from the East Hill with St Leonards in the distance.

Mid Term Review

August 1986 ~ April 1988

Hastings Urban Conservation Project



Acknowledgements

The Hastings Urban Conservation Project would like to give particular thanks to the officers of Hastings Borough Council, East Sussex County Council and English Heritage for their professional advice and support and to the following organisations for their co-operation and encouragement:

Burtons' St Leonards Society
 Old Hastings Preservation Society
 British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
 Hastings Arts
 Hastings Borough Council C.P. Agency
 Hastings and St Leonards First Association
 Hastings Old Town Residents Association
 Hastings Old Town Traders Association
 Keep Hastings Tidy

and many individuals too numerous to list.

Mike Haynes
 Director

Hastings Urban Conservation Project
 58A High Street
 HASTINGS
 East Sussex
 TN34 3EN

0424 446373

Text: Mike Haynes
 Design: Clare Gooding, Mike Haynes
 Illustrations: Clare Gooding, Julius Breeze
 Photographs: Clare Gooding, Mike Haynes,
 Fran Rosser, Kenneth Swift.

Architect's drawings by kind permission of
 The John Woodward Partnership (page 13) and East
 Sussex County Council/Terra Firma (page 16)

Map reproduced by kind permission of the Ordnance
 Survey, Crown Copyright reserved.

Phototypesetting by Masters of Hastings

Printed by Cinque Port Press

Published by the Hastings Urban Conservation
 Project with the assistance of the Community
 Conservation C.P. Team.

© Hastings Urban Conservation Project 1988

ISBN 0 9514094 0 9 Hastings Urban Conservation
 Project Mid Term Review 1986 - 1988. (pbk)

CONTENTS

The Concept	5
Conservation - Investing in the Future	6
Priorities	7
Value for Money	8
Action in the Old Town	10
Tackling the Problems in St Leonards	19
Working with the Townspeople	23
Results through Co-operation	24
Increasing Awareness	26
Information and Advice	27
Pointers to the Future	28



THE CONCEPT

THE HASTINGS URBAN CONSERVATION PROJECT was set up in August 1986 as a result of a joint initiative by Hastings Borough Council, East Sussex County Council and English Heritage. Funded for a 3 year period the Project has sought to improve the appearance of the town by stimulating a process of conservation-led regeneration. This commitment arose out of a growing concern about the future of the town's historic areas but was equally an acknowledgement of their exceptional character and potential.

The Project's work is overseen by a Joint Committee comprised of Borough Council and County Council members with a co-opted representative from English Heritage. Day to day management is the responsibility of the Director who is supported by the Community Conservation Team based in the Project's offices. The Project also draws on the professional expertise of Local Authority and English Heritage staff.

Five aims were set for the Project:

- To raise the standards of maintenance, appearance and preservation of buildings and their surroundings in Hastings.
- To work with the townspeople, involving them in the processes of conservation.
- To bring together all those concerned about urban conservation in Hastings with those with the will, ability and skill to achieve results.
- To convince the people of Hastings of the quality and potential of their Town.
- To secure additional resources so that all these aims can be realised.

At mid-term HUCP is well established in the local scene and has made good progress toward achieving its objectives. A measure of its success is the improving climate of confidence that is becoming apparent as the cumulative impact of the Project's involvement is seen and felt.



*Facing Page:
High Street looking south from the high pavement.*

CONSERVATION - INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Conservation competes with many other demands when difficult decisions are being made about the allocation of scarce resources. It is vital therefore that arguments for conservation are clearly stated and objectives clearly defined. In the past conservation has generally been justified in terms of aesthetics alone. While the contribution that conservation makes to improving the quality of life should not be under-estimated, there are more cogent economic reasons for investing in the assets of the past. Conservation can contribute to the creation of employment and to increasing prosperity.

HUCP seeks through conservation to strengthen the unique qualities of Hastings and St Leonards by preserving and enhancing the historical character of its buildings and spaces. Inherent in this process is the need to maintain a living community and a viable local economy that will help provide and attract the resources necessary for future repair and investment. Successful conservation demands that historic areas, and their buildings in particular, should be attuned to the needs of today, while at the same time ensuring that these changes are carefully assimilated into the local scene, both respecting and enhancing those special characteristics.

Creation of an attractive environment through conservation provides a focus for regeneration of the local economy. The way the town looks, whether it is well cared for and sets itself apart from its competitors by making the best of its distinctive qualities will be important in:

- encouraging the growth and development of tourism at a time when leisure patterns are changing, by maintaining traditional markets and exploiting the heritage potential.
- attracting more people to shop and to use local services
- stimulating new investment in the town by businessmen from inside and outside the area.

In these ways conservation has a key role to play in the revitalisation of the local economy.



PRIORITIES

The first task facing HUCP was to set priorities for action. The framework for this process was the principle that resources should be targeted on relatively small areas so as to achieve the maximum impact in the shortest possible time. It was felt that in this way the Project was most likely to increase public awareness, promote private sector involvement and stimulate wider initiatives by other agencies.

As a result it was decided that the Project should focus its attention on Old Hastings and the heart of Burton's St Leonards. Within these areas action would be targeted towards specific problems, although individual measures would fit within an overall strategy.

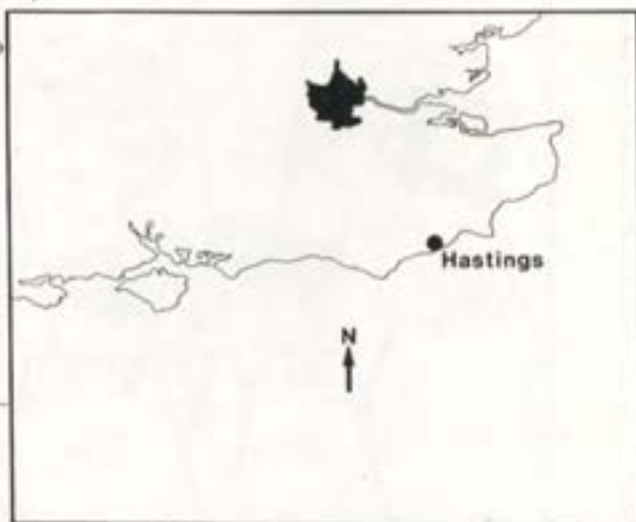
In developing its approach HUCP has sought to:

- provide financial incentives to promote investment in the repair and reuse of buildings and in environmental improvements.
- work with local organisations and individuals to encourage active conservation.
- provide information and advice on conservation matters.
- increase public awareness of the exceptional character of the study area and the benefits of conservation.

A survey of the condition of over 1,700 properties by the Community Conservation Team provided a detailed profile of the study areas, from which priorities were developed. The very different problems apparent in the two areas has demanded a different approach and solutions. However the basic philosophy behind the HUCP approach has been the same:

- to stimulate new projects and schemes which would not otherwise go ahead
- to lever out complementary funds from the private and public sectors.

Project priority areas in Old Hastings and St Leonards



VALUE FOR MONEY

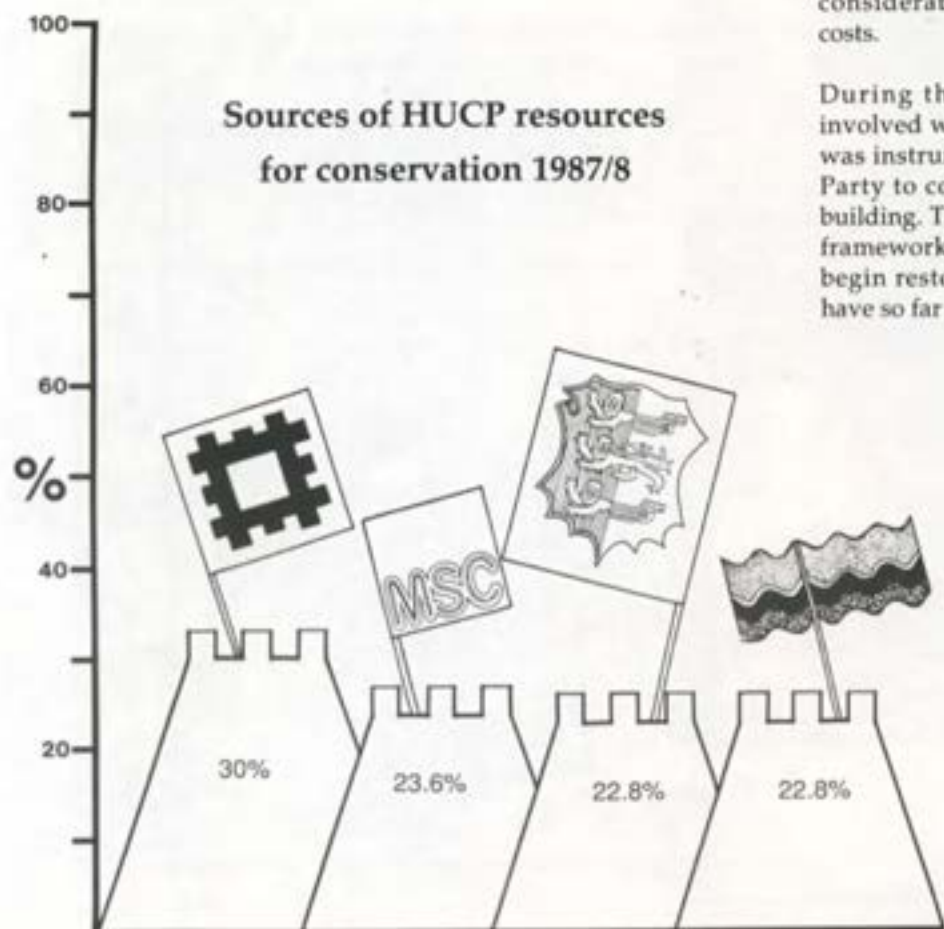
Direct funding for HUCP is made available by the Borough and County Councils for a 3 year period. The budget, which is allocated at the discretion of the Joint Committee, amounted to £50,000 in the first year (1986/7) and £101,000 in the second year (1987/8). Hastings Borough Council's contribution to the Project in the first year was the George Street Pedestrianisation Scheme, with a capital value of £188,000.

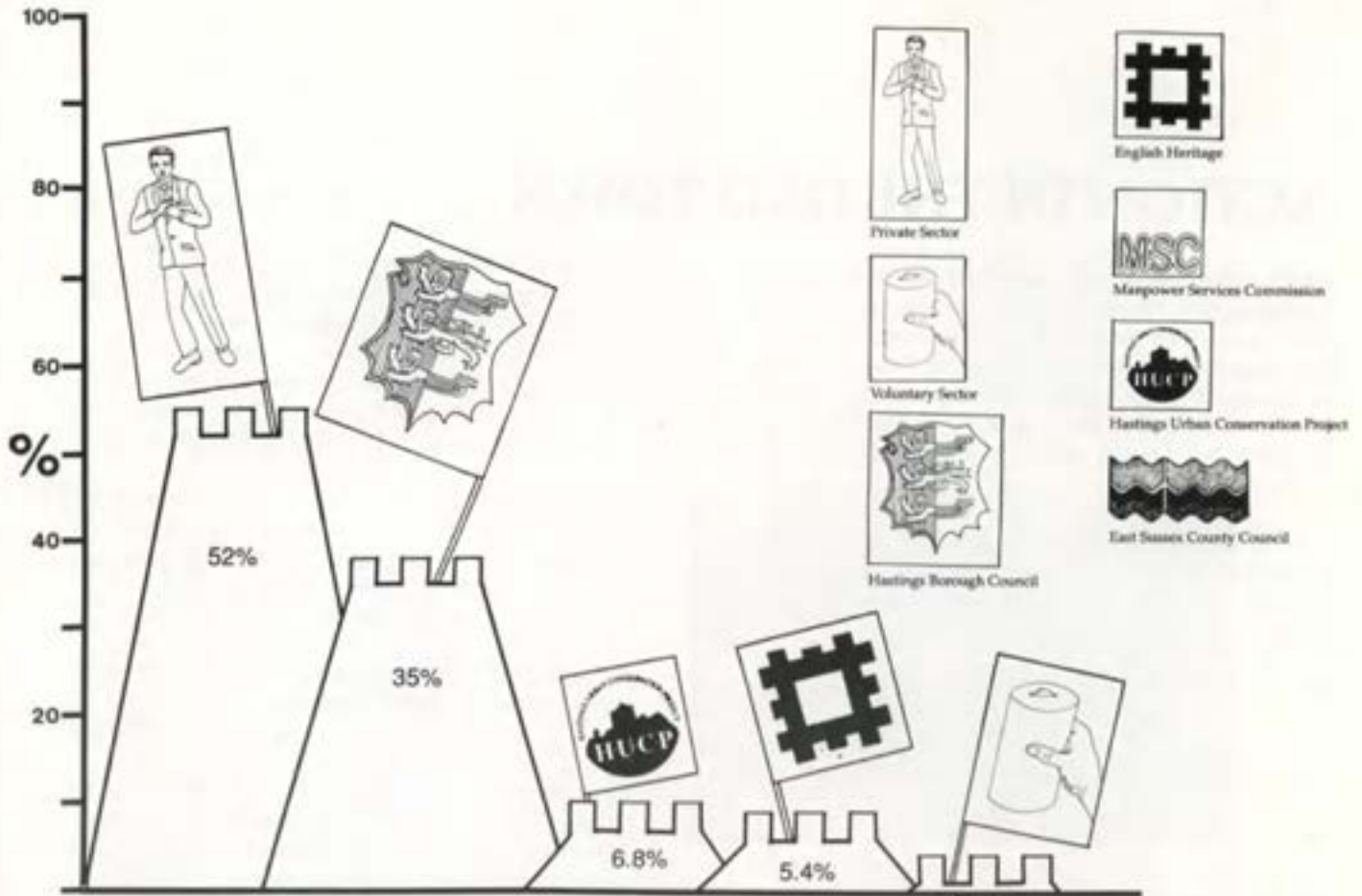
In response to the setting up of HUCP, English Heritage have committed a further £37,000 and £67,350 respectively for each of these years through the normal grant aid channels. Only a proportion of this total is directly administered by the Project.

By March 1988 HUCP had offered a total of £42,000 towards 28 schemes throughout the project areas. It is estimated that this input has been associated with a total generated expenditure of £585,000, representing an overall leverage ratio of almost 14:1. Of this HUCP initiated schemes have generated more than £238,000, a lower but very respectable leverage ratio of 6:1. By far the greatest proportion of this expenditure (86%) has been for building projects directly contributing to improvements in repair. Existing budgets are heavily committed to grant incentives for the coming year during which the cumulative impact of HUCP is expected to generate increasing demand.

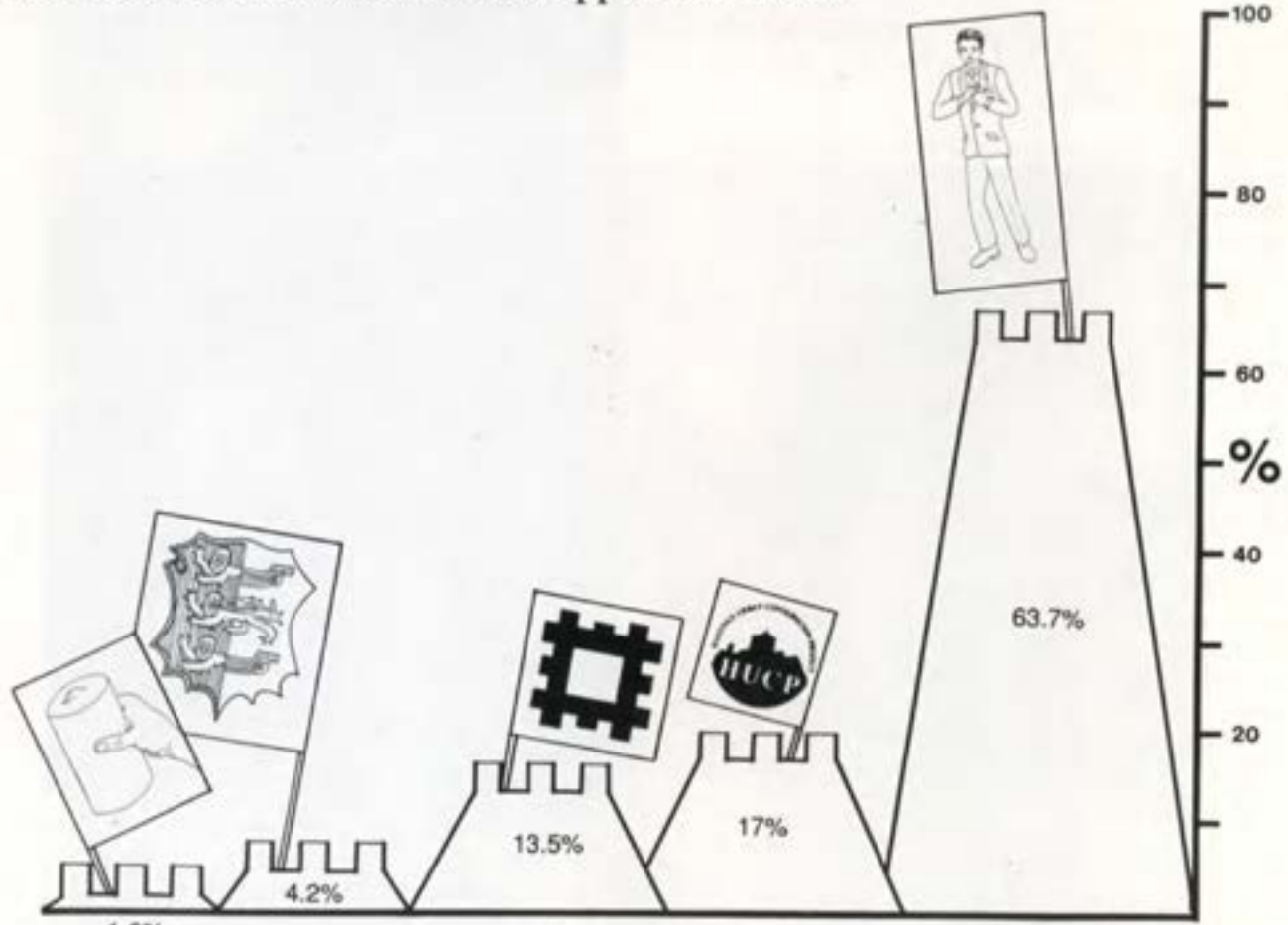
Further substantial financial resources have been attracted through the Community Conservation Team, sponsored by HUCP and funded by the Manpower Services Commission. The team with an input of over £50,000 in staff resources and running costs in each of the years 1987 and 1988, has contributed successfully to the Project in the areas of publicity, promotion and education. It is clear that MSC support has been central to the work of the Project, allowing for a wider involvement than would otherwise have been possible and giving rise to considerable savings in administrative and other costs.

During the course of 1987 HUCP was closely involved with the St Mary-in-the-Castle Project and was instrumental in bringing together the Working Party to consider the repair and future use of the building. The resulting feasibility study provided the framework for a scheme by the Borough Council to begin restoration work to which English Heritage have so far committed over £290,000 in grant aid.





Sources of Finance for all HUCP supported schemes



Sources of Finance for all HUCP initiated schemes

ACTION IN THE OLD TOWN

At the outset it was clear that while Old Hastings had an inherently attractive historical character, there were problem areas where the poor repair of buildings and a degraded environment prevented the full potential being realised. The importance of taking action to improve the situation must be a high priority for a town which earns its living from tourism.

In the main these problem areas tend to be concentrated in prominent locations belying the quality of much of the area beyond and giving a totally misleading impression of the town.

- A low standard of repair and high incidence of vacancy of buildings concentrated in the commercial heart - George Street/High Street/Courthouse Street.
- Poor environment, inappropriate design, derelict and vacant sites associated with the main arrival points - The Bourne/East Parade/Marine Parade/Rock-a-Nore.
- Unattractive approaches ("threshold areas") into the core of the Old Town from the main arrival points.

In tackling these problems the Project has sought to revitalise the local economy so as to ensure a lasting improvement in appearance and repair. Particular emphasis has been placed on measures which will bring more people into the area to use its shopping and service facilities. The strategy combines direct incentives to improve the condition of buildings with measures to make the area a more attractive place for people to spend their time.

IMPROVING THE REPAIR OF THE COMMERCIAL HEART

For many years the stagnant economy of the shopping centre had led to a lack of investment in maintenance and a high rate of vacancy. As a result the buildings had fallen into increasing disrepair - in some cases the very future of the historic environment was becoming threatened. A new vitality was required for this downward spiral to be broken.



Pedestrianisation

George Street, the main shopping street, had been particularly badly hit by decline. The narrow winding street with so much character was constantly choked by vehicles through which pedestrians had to pick their way. The poor environment was in every way a disincentive to the shopper, and prevented the full potential of this historic street being realised.

Pedestrianisation has transformed the scene, making the street once again a pleasant place in which to shop, work and spend the time of day. The scheme, completed in April 1987 was Hastings Borough Council's contribution to the Urban Conservation Project in the first year. New paved surfaces with period street furniture create an attractive traffic free area which brings out the inherent qualities of the street and its buildings.

The result has been that increasing numbers of shoppers and browsers are using the street bringing more custom for the majority of shops. Local traders for their part have responded by improving the range and quality of their stock and, as finance allows, improving the appearance of their premises. The Project has worked closely with the Traders' Association and has jointly sponsored street events to build on the benefits of pedestrianisation by drawing the crowds.



George Street before and after pedestrianisation.



Shop Front Scheme

Hand-in-hand with the improvements brought by the pedestrianisation HUCP saw the need to encourage traders to make the best of their shop fronts if the regeneration of the area was to become a reality. The way in which local businesses present themselves is seen as a key element in attracting trade.

Over the years the traditional character which sets the Old Town shopping area apart from its competitors has become diluted. Some shop fronts have retained their features but years of overpainting and wear and tear have resulted in deterioration of finish and loss of interesting detailing. In other cases early shop fronts have been altered, concealed or replaced by inappropriate modern forms. Fortunately sufficient survives as a basis for the future.

The Shop Front Scheme was introduced to stimulate investment by businesses which strengthen the unique identity of the area and spearhead a general revival. Grants of up to 40% are available for repair and enhancement, and for the replacement of modern shop fronts with more appropriate traditional styles. Within this context schemes are developed in consultation with the trader and local planning authority.

Response to the scheme has been very encouraging. To date 4 projects have received assistance with a further 5 at an advanced stage of negotiations. The number of recent enquiries received would suggest that there is continuing interest in the scheme from local traders which will sustain the present momentum. The demonstration refurbishment of HUCP's former premises in George Street has played an important part in promoting both the Shop Front Scheme and the wider role of HUCP. A comprehensive scheme to restore the Project's new accommodation in High Street is expected to begin in the Spring.



The Shop Front Scheme has helped transform the appearance of a local delicatessen.

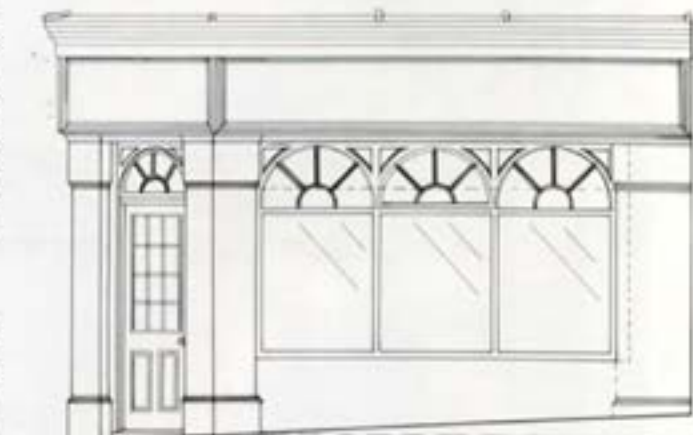




New Image for Fagins Diner

Occupying a prominent site at the entrance to the George Street pedestrian precinct, Fagins Diner provides a clear example of how inappropriate alterations over the years have conspired to create a shop front which lacks both style and balance. Not only does it fail to exploit the inherent character of the Old Town to its advantage, the frontage does little to promote the image of the business inside.

Working with the owner's architect the Project has brought forward a scheme to remodel the shop front in a style which draws its inspiration from surviving evidence of the original design. Attractively mullioned windows reinstate the former elegant proportions which are complemented by a new fascia, traditional draw blinds and interesting detailing.



Architect's sketch of the proposed shop front.



Street entertainment sponsored by the Project has been a popular feature of the pedestrian precinct.

Over The Shop Vacancies



In common with many other historic centres, the Old Town has many shop premises with vacant and under-utilised upper floors. In some cases these spaces are nominally used for storage, in others they may lie completely empty and isolated by the removal of access stairways. The result is that the fabric of the building often becomes neglected and a valuable resource is wasted which could provide much needed office or residential accommodation. Few people are aware of the extent of the implications of the problem.

In response considerable effort has been devoted to raising public awareness. The Summer of 1987 saw the Project hosting the English Heritage exhibition "Over The Shop" which stimulated a great deal of interest and resulted in substantial press coverage. The campaign has been supported by the search for a pilot project to demonstrate how upper floors can be brought back into use profitably. Agreement has been reached with the Borough Council's Environmental Health Department to jointly fund a scheme using home improvement grants "topped up" by HUCP funding. A number of potential projects have so far been investigated and it is hoped that a scheme will be announced during the first half of 1988.



Reeves Antiques - Courthouse Street

A thick layer of dust and yellowing newspapers demonstrated clearly that the floor above the antiques shop had lain vacant for many years. Soon after buying the premises the present owner approached the Project to see if anything could be done to bring this wasting asset back into use.

The result has been the first Over-the-Shop Scheme. A substantial grant from the Project supplemented by an Intermediate Grant from Hastings Borough Council will help with the conversion to a 2 bedroomed flat ideally suited to a couple or small family.

Upper floors nominally used for storage.



"Opportunities for Action": Environmental improvements, as here at the entrance to High Street, would make the main approaches to the Old Town more inviting.



BOTTOM OF HIGH STREET & EAST STREET CAR PARK PROPOSALS

COMPREHENSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

It was recognised at an early stage that attempts to bring more people to the Old Town to take advantage of the shopping and services on offer could not rely solely on upgrading the shopping area alone. Equally important are the approaches by road into the Old Town and the threshold areas linking to the main pedestrian routes along the front. The general environment of these areas, their buildings and spaces, has a major influence on whether local people and visitors stop and explore beyond the main thoroughfares. It was clear that in general these areas did not do justice to the quality and character of the majority of the Town.

To determine priorities and provide a framework for action a comprehensive environmental appraisal has been commissioned by the County Council as a contribution towards the Project's programme. The study will identify key areas for environmental improvement and provide clear guidelines for the development of detailed schemes. HUCP has allocated finance for Enhancement Grants which may assist a wide range of schemes including repair, enhancement and environmental improvement.

Rock-a-Nore Garage Enhancement Scheme

Rock-a-Nore Garage in the heart of the fishing quarter had been the most glaring eyesore on the approach to one of the town's principal visitor car parks. The emphasis given by the Project to enhancing key locations such as this and an offer of grant aid encouraged the owner to carry-out a facelift scheme.



Within a short period the new grants have stimulated a general improvement of the appearance of 4 properties at the entrance to High Street from East Parade which will be reinforced by the refurbishment of the Project's own offices. In Rock-a-Nore 2 small scale restoration schemes are beginning to show the way forward. The rapid response to this recent initiative points to the scope for further improvements in these and other areas.

Elsewhere in the Old Town, Pelham Crescent and Pelham Arcade with the Church of St Mary-in-the-Castle at their centre provide a major challenge to conservation. With the future of the Church now assured HUCP has negotiated a jointly funded Town Scheme agreement with English Heritage which will encourage the repair of surrounding properties. The Project sees its role as providing very real support to the refurbishment of St Mary's through the revitalisation and improvement of its setting. A comprehensive scheme for both Crescent and Arcade is to be developed as a basis for future action.

A covering of weatherboarding has transformed the appearance of the Garage, bringing it into harmony with the historic net shops which occupy the opposite side of the road and strengthening the maritime character of the area.





TACKLING THE PROBLEMS IN ST LEONARDS

When Burton founded St Leonards in 1828 on a new site he did so in response to the booming leisure economy of his time. The more recent history of St Leonards has been one of adaptation to the new and very different demands created by the modern world. Few buildings now serve tourism and the area has become almost entirely residential. Many of the villas and terraces are too large for family occupation, and over a period under-occupation and conversion to rented accommodation has resulted in a lack of investment in repair and routine maintenance. The condition and appearance of buildings has deteriorated and the quality of environment has become degraded. As a result the architectural quality of many of the listed buildings has been degraded through unauthorised change.

In St Leonards HUCP has sought to arrest the decline in standards of repair, to encourage the restoration of architectural detail and up-grade the quality of the street environment. Action has been directed to complement and support the substantial investment by private capital in two major refurbishment schemes on Marina. The strategy has depended on:

- the offering of grant incentives to private owners for repair and restoration.
- initiating small scale environmental improvements in co-operation with owners and other agencies.

Priority has been given to advancing schemes which

- lie within the areas where the decline in the condition of buildings has been most severe.
- complement the refurbishment of the Royal Victoria Hotel and Conway Court.



Facing page: The grandeur that is St Leonards.

Dereliction on East Ascent

It appeared that a death blow had been dealt to a derelict and unoccupied building on East Ascent, St. Leonards, when the Great Storm of October 1987 demolished much of the first floor. Many years of neglect had so weakened the structure that demolition might well have resulted.



However the offer of a substantial Town Scheme grant and change of ownership led to a comprehensive refurbishment scheme which will provide a shop unit and 2 flats when completed. There are already encouraging signs that new life has been given to an area which has long been in decline.



Town Scheme Grants For Repair

The main priority set by HUCP was to offer incentives to owners of property in central St Leonards to carry out repairs and begin to reverse the cycle of decline. Grants allow a better standard of workmanship to be achieved and, by increasing confidence in the future of the area, other complementary investment can be attracted. It was therefore of major significance that the Project was able to negotiate a Town Scheme agreement with English Heritage.

The jointly funded scheme with an annual budget of £30,000 over a 3 year period applies to some 78 properties in the area. The County Council's Historic Buildings Architect advises the Project on applications.

A comprehensive promotional campaign has ensured that the response to the scheme has been excellent in its first year, with over 50 enquiries through the Project's offices. Demand has been so high that this year's budget has been increased by agreement with English Heritage to £48,500, an increase of some 60% over that planned. So far 10 buildings have benefited, representing schemes with a total capital value of over £530,000 - a leverage ratio of 11:1.

The most notable project receiving Town Scheme support has been the restoration of the front facade of Conway Court, part of a scheme by a local builder to create 21 flats. Earlier attempts at restoration had not proved successful and the building had deteriorated to such an extent that the present scheme was the 'last chance' to save it from demolition. HUCP has worked closely with the Borough Council which is providing a substantial grant for conversion.

On the far side of the Town Scheme area it has been possible to promote a proposal to completely restore 25 East Ascent. The property, which had lain vacant and derelict for many years casting a blight on the surrounding area, will be converted to a shop and much needed flat accommodation.

Burton's Vision Restored

The survival of the most important architectural set piece in St. Leonards, the seafront colonnades flanking the Royal Victoria Hotel, had been threatened for some time by the sad decay of Conway Court. Several attempts to find the considerable sum of money required to repair the building had met with failure. The enormity of the task seemed to have sealed the building's fate. As with a cancer, once it had gained a hold, the dereliction threatened to spread progressively through the block.

At the eleventh hour a scheme for conversion to 21 flats by local builder S.R. Finch & Co., brought together finance from the Borough Council's Home Improvement Programme and the Project's Town Scheme. The building is now well on the way to regaining its former grandeur, providing a fine example of HUCP acting as the linkage between the public and private sectors.



Conway Court, so near to demolition in 1986, is now nearing the end of an 18 month refurbishment programme.

Royal Victoria Hotel

While the Town Scheme has been successfully tackling the problems of St Leonards, a private consortium has been carrying out the complete refurbishment of the Royal Victoria Hotel. The multi-million pound scheme has done much to re-establish local confidence in the economic future of the area. HUCP has contributed by assisting with the restoration of architectural features where earlier owners had modified the historic design, helping to bring the building back to its former glory.

The hotel will open in the Spring of 1988 and will offer accommodation, restaurant and function facilities to 4-star standard.



The Burton Tomb.

Improving the Environment

To complement improvements achieved in the repair of buildings, HUCP has worked with individuals, local organisations and the local authority to bring forward schemes to improve the environment. This approach has led to the Project promoting a proposal for the landscaping of the Burton Memorial Site which is dominated by the dramatic pyramidal tomb of the founder of St Leonards, James Burton. A programme of planting and reseeding and the construction of a new entrance and pathways will transform this closed church yard into an attractive public space. Information boards providing the background to the architectural and historical importance of St Leonards will make the site a natural link in the town trail. English Heritage, the Borough Council and the Burtons' St Leonards Society have all joined HUCP in funding the scheme.

Significant improvements in the appearance of an area can be achieved by relatively small scale schemes. Three schemes to re-instate iron railings in Stanhope Place and Maze Hill have received grants from the Project, with further support from English Heritage, the Borough Council and the Burtons' St Leonards Society. The enthusiasm of property owners for these improvements has been especially encouraging.

A Setting for the Burton Memorial

Following an approach by the Burtons' St. Leonards Society, HUCP has developed an attractive scheme to landscape the Burton Memorial Site, last resting place of St. Leonard's distinguished founder James Burton. The pyramidal tomb which dominates this small burial ground is little known even amongst local people.

The scheme, designed by Hastings Borough Architects Department, will open up the site for the enjoyment of both residents and visitors, creating a pleasant public space with attractive grassed areas, paved pathways, planting and seating. On site interpretation will increase public awareness of the historical importance of St. Leonards.



WORKING WITH THE TOWNSPEOPLE

A feature of HUCP's approach has been to work with local organisations and individuals with an interest in conservation and the environment to develop new initiatives and increase public awareness. Regular contact has been maintained and useful associations have developed. Particularly strong links have been forged with the two amenity societies in Burtons' St Leonards and the Old Town. The Project has worked with many other organisations including traders organisations, residents associations and community groups. The clearest sign of this co-operation has been the number of joint schemes which have come forward.

The Burtons' St Leonard Society has been closely involved in the development of two projects - the imaginative scheme to landscape the Burton Memorial Site and the re-instatement of iron railings around the St Leonards Gardens. The Society and HUCP are contributing substantial funds to both schemes which have also attracted grants from other sources. The Project has also assisted the Society with searching for suitable premises which led to the opening of the Burtons' Centre in March 1988.



HUCP has also provided support for 2 projects developed by the Old Hastings Preservation Society. As part of a continuing programme of restoration, assistance has been given to the Society for the rebuilding of 2 net shops which had collapsed before remedial work could be carried out. The Project has been particularly pleased to be associated with the preservation of one of the most distinctive features of the town.

Nearby the East Well occupies a prominent position on Rock-a-Nore Road, down which so many visitors to the town pass. A comprehensive refurbishment scheme promoted by the Society, which will restore the Well as an historic feature in the townscape, has been promised substantial support by HUCP and English Heritage. The scheme is to be officially launched as part of the local contribution to Environment Week.

The threat posed by new TV aerials to the character of the Old Town gave another example of results through co-operation. The problem arising from the installation of a new relay station was brought to the attention of the Project by the local residents association. The result was an advisory leaflet designed by HUCP, printed by the Borough Planner's Department and distributed by the association to every household.

One of the collapsed net shops in course of reconstruction.

RESULTS THROUGH CO-OPERATION

The Urban Conservation Project has acted as a focus for the discussion of conservation problems, and has in many cases provided the means to achieve a solution and has been a catalyst for action. This has occurred on a variety of levels from such day to day matters as putting an owner in touch with the expert advice needed to solve a persistent damp problem to contributing to discussions of the feasibility on high capital value projects.

St Mary-in-the-Castle Church

At the outset of the Project it was clear that the decay of St Mary-in-the-Castle posed by far the greatest single challenge to conservation in the town. The pedigree of the church was impeccable - listed grade II* and occupying a dominant position on the sea front, it rivals anything to be seen in any of the town's South Coast neighbours. Its condition had unfortunately deteriorated to such an extent that repair would be both costly and difficult. The key to the situation would prove to be the finding of an after use that would justify the investment of resources required to bring the building back from the sad state of neglect into which it had fallen, but also respected its architectural quality.



Faced with a situation where it seemed likely that demolition might result, HUCP acted to bring together all those with an interest in the church's future in the St Mary's Working Party. The work of the group resulted in the Borough Council commissioning a feasibility study by London based consultants, Urbed, who specialise in finding new uses for old buildings. The report proposed a mix of uses which would make both economic sense and provide the town with much needed facilities - creating a focus for regeneration.

The study formed the basis for the Council's far-sighted decision to commit itself to the repair of the church. In response English Heritage, who were represented on the Working Party, gave a 75% grant towards purchase and offered over a quarter of a million pounds towards the restoration - the latter at a rate of 40%, well above the 25% norm for local authorities.

Work on the restoration began in February 1988 with the erection of a temporary roof to allow the structure to dry out. The local authority's attention is now focused on securing a suitable end user.

Environment Week

At another level the Project has brought together ten local organisations with an interest in the Environment to make a co-ordinated contribution to Environment Week. This national event begun by the Civic Trust and now backed by UK 2000 focuses attention on the work of local environmental groups.

Many weeks of work by all involved have resulted in an impressive programme of events ranging from guided walks and coffee mornings to practical environmental projects. The programme has been co-ordinated and part funded by HUCP.

Left: Waymarking during Environment Week.

Facing page: St Mary-in-the-Castle safe under its temporary roof.



INCREASING AWARENESS



Conservation has added a new dimension to the school curriculum.



Hastings and St Leonards has a wealth of architecture from many periods from which the town derives its exceptional qualities and distinctive character. Hand in hand with its programme of incentives and initiatives, the Project has sought to increase public awareness of this quality and of the benefits of conservation. It was with this in mind that the Community Conservation scheme was set up with funding from the Manpower Services Commission. The team has allowed a comprehensive publicity and promotion campaign to be mounted, on a scale which would otherwise have been beyond the resources of the Project.

Two important publications are regularly produced from the HUCP offices. 'Keystone' a quarterly magazine which includes in-depth articles and features of general interest. Over 200 copies are distributed to organisations and individuals both locally and nationally, generating a great deal of interest and comment. The Project newsheet, 'Update', carries stop-press items of topical interest to a wider readership. Artwork, design, layout and printing are carried out "in house".

Three major exhibitions and a number of smaller displays have been prepared by Project staff. Despite a shortage of suitable venues attendance has been good, reaching many who might not otherwise have cause to become involved in conservation. The exhibitions are made available to local organisations for display free of charge.

A key element in the campaign to increase awareness has been the development of an education programme for use by local schools. Through the programme schools have been encouraged to involve both staff and pupils in conservation. Close links have been forged through the Hastings Teachers' Centre who have helped with advice, encouragement and distribution of material. A Guided Walk service is available on request and is supported by teachers notes, fact sheets and pupil's work sheets.

Although primarily aimed at junior children in the first instance, considerable interest has been shown by secondary schools. The service, which was launched in the Autumn of 1987, has been used by 4 schools over the Winter months, with many bookings for the Summer term. Education packs have been requested by school groups from London and abroad, and will be available for schools using the Field Studies Centre at Battle.

INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Much of the everyday work of HUCP is taken up by providing a service to the public, giving information and advice on a wide range of conservation matters. Central to this role has been the Conservation Shop, located prominently in the Old Town which is staffed continually during office hours. The Shop is the public face of the Project.

Information and advice is available to enquirers on grant aid, legislation, materials, suppliers, builders, craftsmen and specialist services. The advisory service is backed by a library of material drawn from a host of sources. In many cases HUCP is able to put the public directly in touch with the kind of sources. In many cases HUCP is able to put the public directly in touch with the kind of specialist advice they need or the appropriate authorities, which will undoubtedly save them both time and money. Often the Project merely lends a sympathetic ear to an individual's problems or explains official procedures.



Open house.



It is estimated that over 800 people have visited the Conservation Shop in the past year alone. Many telephone enquiries are received and dealt with daily.

The advisory service is backed up by a growing number of leaflets and brochures produced with the assistance of the Community Conservation Team in house. Door to door distribution has proved to be a very effective and cost efficient way of putting owners in touch with the various sources of finance available for the repair and improvement of their property.

Publicity received by HUCP through the media has been very encouraging. The Project has featured on Radio Sussex on 11 occasions and increasing interest is being shown by the local newspapers. Several magazines have carried articles, about or inspired by HUCP, most notably Country Life, Period Homes and Heritage Outlook.

POINTERS TO THE FUTURE

The basic approach adopted by the Project has now been firmly established and provides the framework for the coming 16 months. The various grant incentives set up to tackle particular problem areas are being increasingly called upon and are beginning to show real improvements on the ground.

The Project is well known locally, is increasingly used as a source of information and advice, and is continually raising public awareness about conservation through the Community Conservation Team.

Because of delays in the system it has taken time and effort to establish this momentum. These delays are unavoidable - the time required to identify problems and effective means to overcome them, lags in the flow of information, the delays inherent in building projects. Only when local confidence in the future is raised above the critical threshold will owners be prepared to invest **their** money in repair and improvement. Once started the process is cumulative.

The second stage of the Project will be a very busy time. Existing programmes will become increasingly important with corresponding demands on staff time. There will also be flexibility within the resources available to become involved in new projects and new initiatives, perhaps exploiting opportunities opened up by the Hastings Heritage Trust or with other local organisations.

HUCP can be seen as having a key role in promoting conservation in Hastings and St Leonards. The impact of the Project is not merely cosmetic, it is a force for regeneration in the local economy and contributes in a very real sense to the creation of employment and prosperity. By the injection of relatively small sums, substantial amounts of private and other investment can be generated. However although the achievements of HUCP to date have been encouraging, and these will be built on in the coming year, a fundamental change in the appearance of the historic areas of the town requires a long term commitment through the Project's period and beyond.



The refurbished Royal Victoria Hotel - a vision of the future.