



MARGATE CIVIC SOCIETY
(Registered Charity No 257884)

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THANET DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Dear Bob and Madeline

FUTURE HIGH STREETS FUND

You will of course know full well that this 'windfall' comes most opportunely for Margate's (and Thanet's) fortunes. It presents distinct possibilities for continuing the 'creative momentum' and solving possibly several of the Council's 'headaches' at one bound ! I had been expecting to wait for the Dormant Funds largesse later in the year but there's a Man in a Hurry in Marsham Street.

The Minister, Jake Berry, said on the Boxing Day launch that he expected areas to set out an **Overall Vision** with specific improvements contributing to said vision.

Margate is of course the 'role model' for 'Ghost High Streets' (especially selected for visitations by gentlemen in ermine recently) – and the retailer gloom continues to deteriorate : Henry's packed up, Ministry of Pies packing up, bookmakers at risk over Fixed Odds Betting terminals, 'rent to buy' operations imperilled. So 'diversification is all' and it would be rather odd if Margate hadn't put in its Expression of Interest by 22 March.

Most bids are expected to be in the region of £5 to 10 millions, private partnerships encouraged, and They are looking for 'oven readies' and They are not looking for a 'scattergun approach of light touch intervention' but to 'drive growth and ensure future sustainability'. Margate as it seems to me enjoys appropriate advantages.

- 1 'The Turner Effect' – widely recognised as a success on which to build
- 2 As evidenced by the beds coming on stream : Dreamland Hotel, Fort Hill Hotel ... looking to develop conference business and grow the town's attractions
- 3 The very positive tourism figures surfacing – not least foreign visitors and the long-established EFL market (40,000 a year to Thanet as a whole.
- 4 The compact nature of the 'Central Business District' (the Fund includes 'town centres'

and excludes large conurbations e.g. Brighton – They have Us in mind.) From the Lido to the Sea Bathing is half an hour's (scenic) walk. The Station is on top of the beach.

- 5 As a low skill, low wage area Thanet is particularly at risk to automation – and if the Airport either doesn't come off or is long delayed by becoming a lorry park reserve then the 'tourism offer' is that much more essential for the local economy.

'The Overall Vision of a Cultural Quarter'

- 6 Creative Industries are booming and a main plank in HMG's overall industrial strategy – Folkestone already has its Creative Quarter courtesy of the De Haan Foundation.

The Margate Economic Plan has The Margate School as its objectives :

- 1) to occupy the High Street
- 2) to support the 'creatives'
- 3) to encourage the NEETs

with inter alia technology. Modest success in the Coastal Communities Fund recently shows that the Ministry understands this. *The Fund is willing to cofund projects that are already started.*

TMS has the potential to further engage the wider community in partnership with Thanet Technologists and could host an 'Urban Room' (a la Folkestone) and a permanent Christopher Walker Gallery (his son has over 5,000 paintings/drawings of this well-known local artist : I would like a temporary display of Margate material for Heritage Open Day 2019.)

As you know, TMS had already published its 5 Year Plan for the earlier round of the Coastal Community Fund so is 'oven ready' and flexible as to premises. It's here to stay.

- 7 Creative Industries includes 'Museums' : representations were made a year ago following the Heritage Strategy Workshop about the prospect of harnessing our archaeological heritage for the Old Town Hall. The heritage is wider than Thanet : UKC run a Transmanche MA in archaeology, Thanet sits at the bottom of Doggerland. With modern technology much may be compressed in little space. No shortage of material – the potential to be *the* archaeological museum for East Kent *and* Pas du Calais.

It is also of course true that we have done little to capitalise on J M W Turner but perhaps that would be more 'futuristic' not only requiring premises acquisition but determining content?

And in this 'category' an 'outlier' Hornby Museum would be very desirable for the High Street – a modest exhibition encouraging people to visit the main course (this idea arises from Hornby asking to be included in this year's Heritage Open Day – sounds very positive and indicates an amenability for early pursuance.)

- 8 The wretched Andrews Passage saga – at least 5 years old – which has helped to ruin the Lower High Street trade. In this context 'pedestrianisation' of the LHS would encourage 'browsing' and the niche 'retro retailers' who are less vulnerable to online invasion.

The above 'Vision' would be 'oven ready' enough for the First Phase and 'community minded' with plenty of 'sustainability' making use of changing technology as stipulated by the Fund. In theory at least the physical infrastructures are already in public ownership (?)

For the 'Ongoing Culture Quarter Vision' (and add to taste) :

- 9 The possibility of adding to the Theatre Royal contribution : museum/drama school ?
- 10 Royal Sea Bathing Chapel : Margate Civic Society has asked for this to be upgraded to Two Star because of its national significance. Has potential as a 'scrofula museum', a conservatoire (Father Willis organ) and general High Victorian connections through the architect (big friend of Lord 'Come into the garden Maud' Tennyson.)
- 11 The Lido : well, if a million or so can be spent on a 'coastal revival' up North on such then Cliftonville must be in a future market as a 'heritage thalassotherapy centre.) Application was made recently by TDC to the Coastal Revival Fund for 'seedcorn appraisal' and this is a project whose time must come eventually.
- 12 The Upper High Street – that remains the problem that may only be solved in the very long run by 'residentialisation' in entirety (as may be in part the Lower High Street 'above the shop' which 'densification' is what the Fund wants to hear of course – hopefully providing jobs for local tradesmen in the process.)

Perhaps a 'brainstorm' (or three) can be organised with a dedicated Officer to expand on matters and sort out what is realistic and do-able in the near future ? For sure the Ministry must be awaiting our collective response.

Regards and Upwards & Onwards

Geoff O

c Uwe Derksen (co-author of the Margate Economic Plan)