



***Trendification? Capturing
change in St Leonards on
Sea, 2015-2020. (Sample)***

***By Chris Connelley &
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Contents Page

Title and contents pages	1
Introduction.....	3
The theory of Gentrification	9
Describing St Leonards On Sea	22
St Leonards On Sea – the facts.....	37
Changing properties	50
Changing shops.....	61
Changes inside buildings	70
Increase of artists and street art.....	100
Increase in community engagement	125
Two cultures clash.....	135
Any common ground?.....	149
Resident views on such changes.....	162
Conclusion	173
End & Bibliography	183

1. Introduction: getting to grips with the ‘G-word’.

Few terms are as loaded and invite such controversy as gentrification.

The mere mention of the ‘G- word’ will set many people off. Indeed, most conversations on it will be preoccupied with the apparent transformation of many of our towns by an occupying army of bourgeois arrivals whose presence heralds the loss of all that we know and love, whilst also anticipating the imminent social cleansing of less advantaged groups. The impression given is that if you are not loaded, then you are about to be off-loaded to somewhere less pleasant, however, challenged the postcode you have lived in.

A little investigation reveals that the term is not new. In fact, it has been in use for half a century now. It was originally coined by sociologist Pat Glass to characterise the first wave movement of young professionals into unattractive and previously off-limit inner-city areas, such as Camden, Islington and Camberwell in the 1960s. This generation of baby boomer urban pioneers bucked the dominant trend of moving into the monochrome suburbs in favour of reclaiming often dilapidated, unloved and multi-occupied Edwardian and Victorian properties. They invested time and effort in renovating them, salvaging original features taken out by previous occupants as part of the post-war nation’s increasing fixation on DIY and modernity.

Over time, as the pioneers were joined by large numbers of their fellow professionals, attracted by affordable property prices and the reassuring presence of people just like them, neighbourhoods with traditionally difficult reputations became increasingly desirable. This in turn generated still greater interest, creating an upward spiral in house prices.

This priced some interested parties out, whilst generating ripple effects into neighbouring areas still unreconstructed by the improving middle classes. Thus, in the 1980s, as Islington became unaffordable Hackney became its newly desirable first cousin, offering similarly rich pickings for those bold enough to venture into its still unreconstructed streets. Decades later, as Hackney saturated, and opportunities for affordable bargains declined, the shift extended further east, taking in parts of Newham, Walthamstow, and more recently, Leyton, historically seen as on the wrong side of the railway tracks.

Much discussion around the '*G- word*' has traditionally been centred on London and other big urban centres. However, the effect of a half-century of constantly changing and ever-expanding borders for gentrification, the dearth of family house building and the near-continuous price rises over the past 30 years has encouraged more people to seek affordable homes outside of London. The downturn of 2008 produced a slowing down, rather than a collapse of high house prices, and was therefore only a marginal blip. Comfortable 'professional' audiences have continued to seek refuge outside the M25, extending the social phenomenon to areas that thus far have been largely unaffected by such trends.

This is precisely why we are now talking about gentrification here on the coast in Hastings, and also in rival towns like Margate, leading to significant and consistent Sunday supplement coverage as the latest happening location. Indeed, barely a weekend goes by without a property or lifestyle column celebrating our transformation from a 1980s hard drugs addled benefits playground to a current cultural hotspot, up there with the Hackney and St Ives of the world. There's always an element of hype to such coverage, and an inevitable recycling of stories, but it is hard to dispute the buzz around those parts of town that have attracted the chattering classes. With galleries and coffee shops opening weekly in the Old Town and Central St Leonards, this book investigates what gentrification looks like on the ground and investigates whether this recent social change is simply a trendy phase the local market is experiencing or, as many suspect, it is deeper-rooted and here to stay. Indeed, writing in our new covid-dominated world, the word on the street is that this phenomenon is gathering pace as many more urban dwellers seek a different lifestyle outside of cramped city centres apartments, extending gentrification's reach beyond obvious frontier areas to take in hitherto ignored parts of Ore, Bohemia Road and the still patchy stretch of bedsit land around Queens Road.

Whilst the news might be generally upbeat, there's a continuing sense of risk and fragility around the town's regeneration, with enduringly challenging metrics around the town's health, wealth and education, reflected by the borough's unenviable status as the 13th most deprived local authority in the UK. Coupled with the recent shutdown of the Hastings campus of Brighton University after less than a decade, there is, however, a sense the town is coming out of the darkest depths of depression, though still on a long-distance journey out of acute structural disadvantage.

For many locals, especially those in the service sector, the arrival of the new audiences, be they Down from London (DFL), Across from Brighton (AFB) or Slumming it from Tunbridge Wells (STW), is unconditionally good news, bringing populations with spending power into an economy for so long defined by the absence of any disposable income. However, this is by no means a universal reading, and the area's newfound fashionability attracts much adverse comment. This is mainly focused on the effects of the recent hike in property prices, both for sale and for rent; and the substantial and rapid change to the look and feel of local communities, as residential streets get spruced up and retail areas see traditional shops give way to artisanal bakeries, coffee shops and galleries. Moreover, there is a feeling, supported by growing evidence, that the poor are being displaced just at the point at which improvement is making its presence felt. Plumb deeper and there's usually also a residual class-based resentment against incomer populations, who are seen as representing a fundamentally different set of interests that somehow disrespect the town's underdog status.

Unsurprisingly, there's an element of truth to both arguments. The recent upturn has seen high levels of new business start-ups in even grim thoroughfares, leading to an expanded range of local shops and services. At the same time, the area has seen steep property price rises that have restricted the choice for many local first time buyers, whose mortgage options are limited by low local earnings. That said, property prices are still relatively low, certainly in terms of the south east economy, outside of clearly defined hotspots like Central St Leonards which effectively operate their own separate residential marketplace. Larger social housing agencies like Optivo and Orbit are also major players locally, whilst ongoing efforts to develop a community land

trust for housing on the site of the former Ore Power station is making inroads into the market. Moreover, community housing projects are being further developed to protect diverse occupancy in the central White Rock area to ensure issues of affordability and access are tackled and maintain a high public profile. This paints a more complicated picture than just one of social displacement.

The issue about the “*G- word*” and class is perhaps the most interesting, and most complex. It effectively operates as a Trojan horse, or big tent, for a cluster of issues about change, community and the role of immigration and the ‘outsider’ to be talked about using a recognisable single word. It often is talked about in geographically isolated communities and produces headlines that different groups assume to be completely true or false, when in fact the full picture is much more complex.

This book attempts to explore the meaning and extent of gentrification in a specific location here on the south coast, using interviews, before and after pictures and local publicly available statistics to track change. This multi-method approach attempts to track the extent of population shift and to identify the various changes underway in the area. Our aim was to listen to a diverse range of residents, drawing in those who are newly arrived, earlier relocates and long-term locals. The interviews attempt to capture people who represent different views and are seen as change-makers in the area, in the past and in more recent times. Some have been here for decades, are invested in the past and lament its passing, while others are very much part of a new wave of investment into the town. Whatever the perspective, our interviews provide a unique space for people

to open up and tell their story, reflecting on the character, identity and prospects for a place they all call home, in a town that makes much of its community spirit.

Overall, we characterise the changes going on around us as trendification, an alternative construction that we believe is more nuanced than full-blown gentrification. When we started writing this book, the social and economic changes in Central St Leonards were modest, and limited, contributing to the area's enhanced appeal to investors and residents alike. However, we recognise that by the time of publication, full-blown Gentrification may well have started, with a marked change in the physical appearance of the area and the likelihood that some people have been pushed out.

Just like St Leonards itself, we hope this book will interest, excite, inform and amuse you. Though we recognise that it will probably also confuse, frustrate and even infuriate some of you. The one thing we can promise is that you won't be bored.

Chris Connelley & James Prentice.



2. How to spot if an area is being gentrified? The 10 sure signs Gentrification is happening where you are

James Prentice: “I have lived in St. Leonards on sea for 15 years now and have grown up seeing the town through several phases. When I first arrived, I saw the traditional seaside town features, which during the recession changed into a series of empty shops before slowly developing back into a busier high street (but with some more arty shops added in). In case you get the impression that not much had happened over this time, let me make clear that the changes I have witnessed over the last couple of years since coming home from university have been fast-paced and dramatic. Whether we call what’s going on trendification or gentrification, it is crystal clear that there has been a marked increase of newcomers, typically from London or Brighton, and of younger, cultural and artistic-minded peoples. This has all helped recreate a local neighbourhood that looks and feels younger, more diverse, open-minded, fashion-conscious and arty than it once did. It is this kind of “*trendy*” place that gets fashionable tongues wagging, generates ever greater attention and starts discussions around Gentrification.”

The Ten signs are as followed: 1. A proliferation of new coffee shops. 2. The loving restoration of hitherto rundown property (Pastoral colours). 3. The plantation shutter is the window dressing of choice 4. Hipster types suddenly appear everywhere. Warning signs: Man Buns, groomed beards, skinny jeans, hats and designer dogs everywhere 5. Specialist shopping. Think book shops, vintage clothing, second hand, retro furniture, artisanal food and drink. 6. Art, art and yet more art. 7. A Street Market. 8. Bicycles and all things cycling. 9. A fixation on alternative lifestyles, health and wellbeing, for example through yoga or

meditation. 10. A focus on community. Check out bursting local noticeboards, window flyers and local action stalls in support of much-loved services like the local Post Office.









Questions

Are you a local, if not, what brought you to St Leonards & How do you earn your living?



My family originally comes from the east end (of London), and I initially grew up in the east end, but then we moved to Chelmsford in Essex when I was around 9 years old. We stayed in Chelmsford for a few years, but then we moved down to Hastings in my teens as my dad had a job for the Hastings print company. We quite often visited family in London and we did not fully settle into the area until I was 15 years old. I trained as a hairdresser shortly after leaving school and I got work in hairdressing businesses around the local area, and after working for a hairdresser in the little common area (Bexhill) I decided I would one day try and set up my own business. I saw an advert in the Friday Ad we had in the shop advertising a premise to buy that was cheap and could be potentially a great location. I knew that Silchester Road was a trading area and that there would be potentially good footfall to help start the business. We first set up the business in 2002, so we have been running for nearly 17 years now. I remember the date we first got started, the 5th of February 2002 and the business really kicked off quite quickly from here as there were only around five hairdressing places in St Leonards at that point.

What was St Leonards Like?

The area was a very busy traditional seaside town trading area. The local college provided a lot more footfall and I remember Silchester Road being of a traditional trading area, with old fashioned sweet shops and corner shops. Some survived the recession, others did not, the sweet shop is now an arts centre and the pharmacy was closed for a long time and has now become a film studio that does not open that much, along with the taxi firm that closed. The traditional trading shops were also spread across other trading roads, such as Kings and Normans Road. I would say that from 2002 to 2008 the roads were always busy with people and we did not have half of the junk shops that we have now, which are increasingly being called antique shops when they are not really known for antiques, unlike a couple of shops in the area are. The area was a lot more diverse in the type of shops that existed. For example, I can only recall 5 hairdressers and they all catered for different parts of the market. You had a traditional barber, one modern barber, a place that concentrated on Afro-Caribbean styles and also a place that focused on traditional haircuts for older women, affectionately known as the 'old dears' hairdresser. I felt that I was the first hairdresser to set up a modern salon offering more modern styles with more modern products. You also had arcade gaming shops, traditional tea and coffee shops, mixed with ethnic minority shops and traditional cafes. On top of all this, you had more fixing shops and garages where you could get needed repairs done and you had more clothes shops that catered for wider audiences. I feel that there was much greater diversity within the economy that catered to a wider range of people living in the area.

The area quickly changed again around 2008 when the recession hit and the local College closed, with the new one being finished in 2009. These events took a lot of footfall away from the St Leonards market area, some businesses failed and a lot of empty shops quickly emerged, which also hurt footfall in the area. Some businesses had to change names and styles to survive, this is where part of the change may have come from as the need to appeal to people with money during the recession years made some businesses change styles, and it was this development that started to change the economy. From this point, there was a spike in homelessness and street drinking, with the Seaview project emerging as its services became in greater demand. I would say the area in the first 7 years since I arrived was quite a thriving little traditional seaside place, which then declined like other traditional seaside towns after the recession hit.

How has the area changed over time, How have you been involved in the community & What do you think these changes are, trendyfying or gentrifying?

The area has experienced huge change within the last 10 years. I think that during the decline the council always had the same old excuses, like cutbacks being out of our control, etc. The place is getting scruffier and untidy in most parts, whilst getting trendier in small parts. I think there is an ever-increasing divide between the smaller trendy areas and larger areas left behind. I think there are increasing divisions amongst people who are seen as trendy and new and the longer-term residents who felt left behind from the changes quickly developing, and not benefitting from them. I think there has been a change in people coming to the area and that the cultural change has not brought a feeling of greater diversity for many people. This may have

led to increased anger for some longer-term residents and there has been a growing problem of crime and vandalism, with some traders possibly being targeted.

I feel that I agree with people who feel the pace of cultural change has lost a sense of identity within the area. I think we were a happy traditional small seaside town that very much catered for families. I feel this is going to be increasingly lost, with the economy not providing affordable services and space for children, which is being lost in favour of new trendy shops, places and events. I think this has been further lost with the loss of community events that no longer cater for families, such as the St Leonards festival offering a lot of alcohol options. It would be nice to have alcohol free community events that cater to more families, so more people can enjoy their day. I think that the newer people arriving demand different types of events and economics and this does not cater for traditional seaside family places, as a result, I think we are losing the culture and identity we previously had. I also feel that a lot of community organisations and events have been taken out of the community's hands and have been contracted out of the area. We are starting to get some of this back, but these organisations and events are still not catering for a diverse audience, particularly younger families. I think these community organisations and events need to be changed to back to more what it was.

One way that I feel the community was once more involved with these events was through my involvement with the St Leonards Business Association (SBA). We were a group of traders around the Kings Road, London Road and Silchester Road area. We were focused on regeneration that could allow traders to survive and keep a diversity within the local economy, and one way we did

this was through helping to organise and promote the St Leonards Festival. I was appointed the spokeswoman, after 3 years serving on a committee for this group as I was straight talking. We fought to get the Christmas lights back as this helped traders during a busy time of the year. We also then went on to work with people who had set up the Town Team to try and get more positive work done around regeneration, for example, we went on to help organise community events like the St Leonards Festival and the Frost Fair parade, where I dressed as a snow queen. I felt like in the early days we ran successful campaigns and got good results that benefitted the local community. I felt we stopped the council from doing negative things and I also felt we produced results that reflected the diversity of the area, whilst keeping the traditional seaside family-based community many traders wanted to protect. However, it all started to go wrong as new people were coming into the area and the Town Team changed. I felt the Town Team reflected a view that felt regeneration meant the town has to be changed into something new, the group lost its focus and became too political with people promoting change, with others wanting to protect traditions and culture. I felt the newbies wanted to change the town, focusing on changing the culture of the place rather than tackling rubbish and social issues that hurt traders. The group split up and there has not really been a trader community group since and this may have resulted in momentum being with those that wanted to change the town. I feel like the town has changed completely and we have lost that sense of community, tradition and being a family seaside place, which makes me feel sometimes I do not know where I am.

Finally, briefly describe St Leonards on sea in the past, in recent and what you expect it to look like the future.

I think that the future will be more of the same changes, where people will say things are improving but with some people like me think it is declining. I have seen the area decline, improve, decline and then improve again, but now I feel it is going down again and I feel this trend will continue. I feel that people coming in will continue to change the area, its outlook and culture. I feel that left-behind places will struggle to take pride in their place and the upkeep of the area will likely not happen. I think the old fashioned community spirit which you can't beat won't return and will increasingly be driven out by changing times. I am not interested in people coming in and buying places, which will increasingly happen, as I want people moving in to be concerned with the upkeep of the area and protecting the traditional seaside town culture of the area, which I fear they won't do. I feel the local economy will be increasingly changed and there will be a lack of diversity within the local area, where you will have too many coffee shops emerge, and I don't feel like we need any more. If you look at the changing nature of the local economy, the rise in new shops offering similar things, especially in food, culture and clothing, will be a continuing trend, and this will continue to push out the diversity of the old traditional seaside economy had. There won't be many independent or chain shops moving into the area, for example, we don't have male clothing options, and a shop like this is needed and could add diversity. But, I just can't see a shop like Burtons moving in, again providing an issue of choice and affordability for many longer-term residents, creating a sense that people are being pushed out as the place does not reflect their interests. Not everyone wants lots of vegan options, some people don't always want lentils. Not everyone wants expensive boutiques, designer, cultural and coffee shops everywhere, some want traditional seaside culture, proper food, cooked properly for great

value for their money, as it is often more affordable for some that still live in the area. We don't have this much anymore and I feel we are losing our traditional culture and identity of the town.



I think there will be more economic problems in the area, such as the Pier, which failed as it did not cater to a wide enough audience. The Pier was too much of a boardwalk, there was nothing for families, a trend I fear will continue. The Pier completely lost its image in its transition, this resulted in a major lack of appeal for some people and the Pier organisers did not seem to come up with a business solution in time to turn things around. I also think the Pier organisers tried to make the Pier into their own culture and image and people in Hastings did not resonate with it. This, along with food being too expensive for families, really did hurt the pier's chances of succeeding. I think we don't live in a good community anymore where people want to provide things for all residents. I think the reaction against the new Pier owner was just awful and showed there is not a good community spirit anymore. Newer people to the town will continue to be quite strong in asserting this new culture and economy onto the town. I think the businessman who took over it will make it into a traditional pier again where families want to go on it, for example,

he is already providing items which appeal to children, like getting their photo taken next to silly seaside images. This change might save this particular economic problem, but this won't happen with other parts of the economy. I fear that other parts will continue to take away our traditional seaside town image and this will result in a less diverse economy, which caters for less and perhaps might not take in enough money as a result. I think the area needs to cater more for a large more diverse audience, especially the traditional elements of the town, as I feel we are losing this traditional element, the town should be for everyone and it is increasingly not.



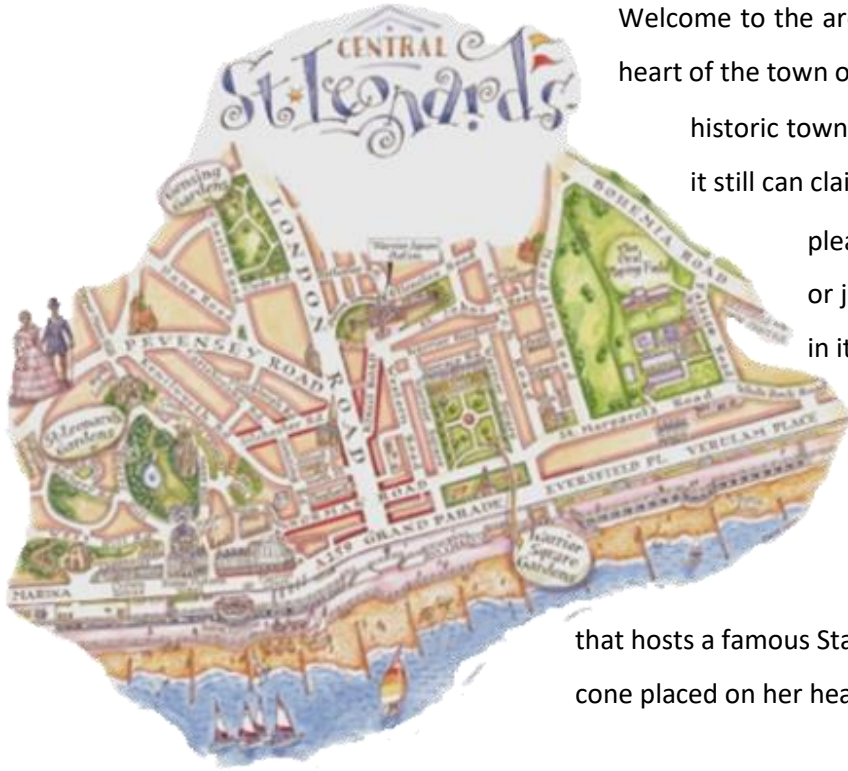
3. Welcome to Central St Leonards

Welcome to the area and council ward called Central St Leonards. This is the heart of the town of St Leonards, located adjacent to the wonderful and historic town of Hastings. Although a much younger town than Hastings, it still can claim its rich history, a place built by the Burton family as a pleasure getaway retreat, a second home paradise for the gentry or just a new town for the upper classes in Victorian times, and in its heyday it would have rivalled even Eastbourne.

The town has gorgeous tall Victorian houses, hosts great architecture and cultural gems of a lost era.

The centre of St Leonards boasts a long marina made great by any sunny day. It boasts Warrior Square, a large park

that hosts a famous Statue of Queen Victoria, who too many times has had a traffic cone placed on her head. The high street, marked in red on the map, highlights



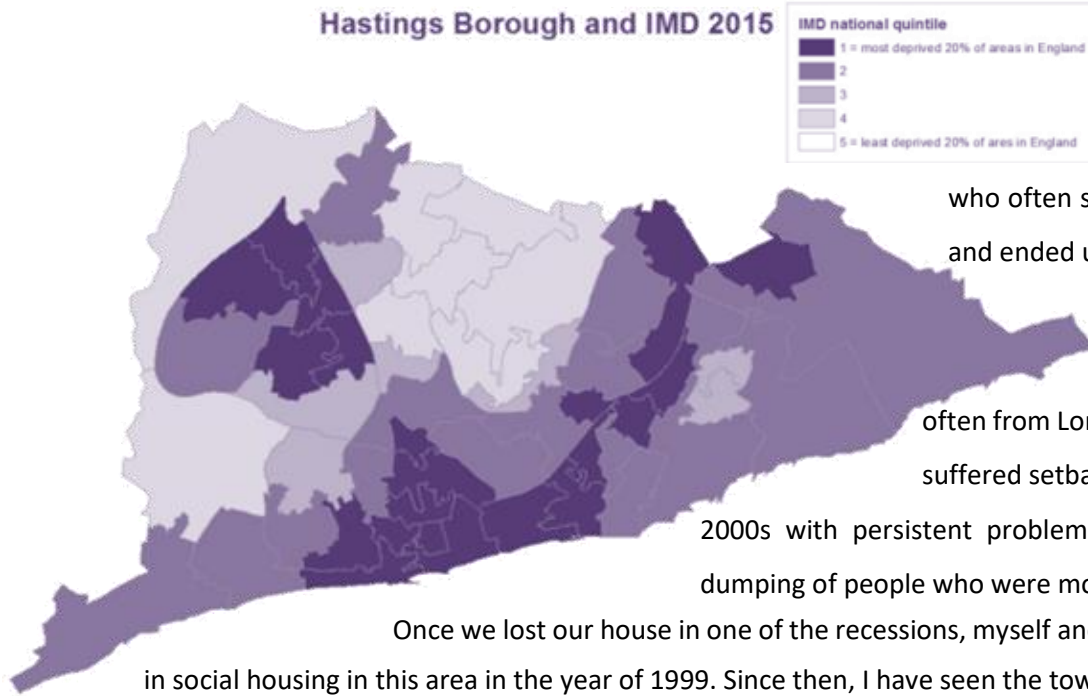


the large historical high street, which still exists to this day. You have the St Leonards Gardens, a park designed for the gentry' class of old, whilst you can also find old solid working-class roads, such as Shepard street, which served the gentry classes whose imposing houses surrounded those who served them. The Town, like many seaside

towns, fell on hard times when tourism

declined and the seaside was no longer the getaway retreat the upper classes demanded. With higher income peoples' tastes moving abroad demand in the local economy fell, people sold up and moved on and many of the old Victorian buildings were turned into HMOs. With this, a high rate of one-bedroom flats were created and many people with social and drug problems were moved into the area as a cheaper alternative. Unemployment remained higher than the national average and so did other common problems. The place started to get a rather unfair reputation as a dumping ground, within the dumping ground town of Hastings.

Hastings Borough and IMD 2015



This negative image has always hidden the positives the area has had going for it, such as a large creative community, which pulls in many artists into the area

who often state they went to the town for a weekend and ended up living there permanently.

Consequently, there has been a slow drip-drip effect of artists moving to this area, often from London and Brighton, since the 90s. The town suffered setbacks in the recessions of the 80s, 90s and 2000s with persistent problems of empty shops, unemployment and dumping of people who were most adversely affected by the recession.

Once we lost our house in one of the recessions, myself and my family ended up being placed in social housing in this area in the year of 1999. Since then, I have seen the town go up and down, producing much social and economic change, however, after I left for university in 2012 and came back in 2015 I was amazed by how much change had occurred. Fast forward to 2020 and the town is vastly different to the St Leonards I remember and grew up in.

History of the area & how we arrived to Gentrification/Trendification.

Over the last few years, St Leonards has enjoyed renewed fashionability after decades of social and economic decline, leading to a stream of new arrivals smitten by its enviable triple legacy of the sea, green space and 19th-century grand designs.

Indeed, there's a sense of the town turning full circle and recovering elements of the grandeur of its earlier days when it was conceived as an exclusive out-of-town enclave for the moneyed elite. This founding vision was developed by London-based builder and property developer James Burton, who acquired 25 acres of hitherto undeveloped countryside in the late 1820s.

His inspiration was unashamedly grand and upmarket, drawing upon his experience of the fashionable urban architecture of the time, including Nash's Regent Park, which is often cited as a source reference. Both sites certainly demonstrated a shared interest in harnessing the power of both built and natural environments, thereby ensuring that the grand villas, while presenting as powerful statement properties in their own right, formed part of an overall grand plan; also exhibiting a clear connection with the broader outdoor environment, most obviously through the provision of integral subscription gardens.

His aim was to create a seductive serviced getaway, the first cornerstone of which, the St Leonards Hotel, opened in 1830. In Burton's town vision, this was supported by an adjacent assembly hall and seawater baths, the intention being for St Leonards to become a noted spa resort comparable to Bath. Such was its scope that the area was the subject of government legislation and the passing of the St Leonards Improvement Act in 1832 conferred its formal identity as a distinct municipality, albeit it as

a private estate rather than a public authority. Another half-century elapsed before this happened, at which point it formed part of the new county borough of Hastings following an administrative combination with its near neighbour.

Sadly, James Burton did not live to see his vision fully realised, the execution of the master plan falling to his son Decimus, who took up the mantle and was responsible for the design of some of the area's most prestigious addresses such as the Uplands, the Lawns and the Mount.

The arrival of the railway in 1851, through what we now know as Warrior Square station, made it easier for visitors to travel directly into the heart of the town and led to substantial additional development, most notably along Kings Road during the late 1850s and 1860s, when it effectively became the local High Street, which provided commercial and retail services for a still-growing town. These later waves of new buildings maintained the tradition creating substantial properties intended for affluent audiences. Such was its ambition and prestige that St Leonards even had its own Pier, which opened in 1891 opposite the St Leonards Hotel, where it all started.

St Leonards was not, however, an entirely bourgeois town. Recognising that the rich typically take on 'help', and that the area's well-heeled householders would need staff on hand to maintain their homes and gardens, Burton's masterplan did include some more modest housing to accommodate those working in domestic service and other trades. This was centred on the densely packed grid of roads running off London Road around Mercatoria, which unlike the grand villas on the Seafront or the

still imposing three and four-storey family houses on the roads near the station, was generally made up of simple two-storey terraced housing intended for the labouring classes.

The advent of the 20th Century saw a changed emphasis, as the classically inspired streetscape confronted unreconstructed modernism in the form of a signature - some would say defining - new building, Marine Court, along with a remodelled public realm oriented around extensive new concrete promenades running from Hastings Pier through to its St Leonards equivalent.

These were the inspiration of the borough's influential engineer and surveyor, Sidney Little, incorporating planters, public baths, shelters and underground parking, and were designed on two levels, a street-level upper deck above a covered walkway below. This is popularly known as Bottle Alley, referencing the use of broken coloured glass as a design feature to break up the vast expanse of concrete.

Marine Court, by contrast, was a bold commercial development that sought to lure new generations of the leisured classes to the coast, in this case by creating a sleek, innovative contemporary apartment building with a conspicuous nautical influence. Marine Court was nothing less than an ocean liner masquerading as a home-from-home, allegedly inspired by the RMS Queen Mary. With integrated dining, dancing and select shopping at ground-floor levels, the Multi-storey Marine Court claimed the crown as the nation's highest residential development on its opening in 1938.

Its uncompromising design will have undoubtedly turned heads, but did not translate into sales, leading to the collapse of the company behind it. War followed soon after, when Marine Court was requisitioned as a base for air force personnel and as an armed defensive structure. Notions of decadent play and partying gave way to gun posts and sustained aerial attack.

The war took its toll on the architecture of the town, with several seafront buildings being damaged, destroyed and demolished in coastal night raids. Sadly, their post-war replacements were typically pedestrian, breaking up and detracting from Burton's imposing planned terraces. Coupled with a changing demography, the decline of the domestic holiday, the tendency for smaller family sizes and the increasing economic challenge of maintaining vast properties as single occupancy addresses, St Leonards entered an extended phase of decline. Many properties fell into disrepair or were unsympathetically converted into apartments or rooming houses, and once vibrant Kings Road lost established stores to new fragile and temporary uses.

Unsurprisingly, the area's reputation declined and St Leonards became increasingly associated with social and economic disadvantage, and with depression, drink and drugs. By the 1990s, it presented as one of the most deprived council wards in the country with a reputation as a place to avoid, especially after dark.

And yet, even in its darkest hour, and in its most dishevelled state, with windows broken, railings removed, historic features lost and stucco surfaces scarred, the grand architectural vision and close attention to detail of the Burton family plan still shines

through. It is this enduring quality that, in recent years, has attracted the renewed interest of a new generation of Down from Londoners who are out for a day trip and are looking for a coastal retreat, and a bit of a bargain.



Pat – Youth Worker and Charity leader (Gizmo).

Are you local, if not, what brought you to St Leonards?



Originally from Brighton, I moved to London in the 1970s. By the end of the 1970s, I wanted to escape London. It was far too busy and I did not feel safe, and I felt the area I was living in was not safe to live in. I moved to St Leonards on Sea because the place name sounded nice, safe and a good place to raise my children. I had not seen St Leonards before, but just decided I needed to move. I moved into St Leonards, near the train station, and started to make a life here and raise my children. After moving out from the place I initially rented in St Leonards, I moved out into the Hollington area. The culture I had experienced in the town so far was mostly beneficial for my family, but it was very much a monoculture and me and my family experienced problems of racism. My children being mixed-raced had difficulties at schools and the wider community from time to time with racist views, which their mixed-race identity made them a target of in such a monoculture.

What was St Leonards Like? Things were going along nicely and we got to know the town more in the eighties as the children were coming closer to leaving school. We began to realise that the town was beginning to develop some major unemployment issues, along with other lack of opportunities becoming an issue as well. Rising crime, particularly racially motivated crime, began to affect the town and my family personally.

How do you earn your living? One opportunity that I came across was to train as a youth worker, which I had a natural interest, and previous experience in. This Diploma came through county council funding and I later became a youth worker for the YMCA. Again, I experienced problems with the town's traditional deep monoculture, where deeply Christian populations, who had a lot of influence in youth projects in the YMCA, did not like what I said sometimes and I had to go and work for other youth projects. I have worked as a youth worker for the council in various projects, such as through holding performing arts events with children from deprived backgrounds in the Broomgrove estate in Hastings.

How have you been involved in the community? I spent a few years living away from Hastings for employment purposes, which I could do as the children had then moved out of home and had their own lives. I worked in Stratford upon Avon and Worthing and then moved back to Hastings in 2001 for a Youth for Life event I helped arrange with fellow youth workers. Through events like this, we tried to break down barriers in such a monoculture. It was after this that I had realised the area was becoming a much more diverse society compared to the last time I was in the town and I moved back to St Leonards on sea.

It was then I set up my Charity, Gizmo, which focused on delivering performing art projects to children from deprived backgrounds. Along with this, after attending a university writing philosophy course when living away from Hastings, I also wrote local play productions. My charity started to acquire local government projects in the early 2000s. We had a centre in Hastings that run regular workshops, 8 altogether, that focused on film, performing arts, dance and drama activities. The project was well-received by a wide range of people in a society increasingly feeling comfortable with a more diverse nature to the town. Most sessions could have up to 30 children, as its popularity spread through word of mouth, and the county council regularly funded these popular events. It was happy to fund facilities and workers and the charity grew from here. Since 2003, I would estimate that around half a million pounds has been raised through all the projects and activities we have been involved in.

How has the area changed over time? Things initially were improving, and the area was slightly more diverse and accepting of the relatively small changes happening. Groups in the area were being supported and the community was developing. Social problems were easing and the town was becoming an economically more vibrant and happy place. However, in recent years many of the community groups and charities that have been working in the town for a long time have been abandoned, and this has certainly been the case with Gizmo. Support for us has been withdrawn and people like me are no longer favoured as the town changes. The economy has also changed from a vibrant one that I could access to one that is now more specialist and

not accessible to many longer-term residents of St Leonards. The place is being advertised as a place on the up, but it does not feel like that by many people in St Leonards.

What do you think these changes are, trendyfying or gentrifying? Initially, some of the changes were quite nice and gave people more choice, but in recent years this has changed into gentrification. The look of people has changed quite dramatically, and there is a newfound richness in the town from the new people moving in. There has been a rise in these people buying homes, and a clear rise in the number of second homes available. I have had some unpleasant experiences of DFLs (Down From Londoners) who have personally described me as “you people,” and I have felt they look down on some of the longer-term residents of the area. The shops have completely changed and do not attempt to cater for the tastes or budgets of the longer-term residents that have survived the rising house prices. The town is slowly being changed to parts of London I remember, such as Chelsea. We are becoming Kings Road in Chelsea rather than St Leonards on Sea. A lot of the shops are being turned into storage units for DFLs, rather than retail spaces that will benefit the residents of the town. Local people and the new residents shop in two different types of shops, and there are now two different economies and societies living in the same area. St Leonards is being gentrified more and more as DFL landlords move in, push up property prices, force out locals and change the area to reflect their tastes and cultural interests.

Finally, briefly describe St Leonards on sea in the past, in recent and what you expect it to look like the future.



St Leonards originally was like most deprived seaside towns, but it always had things going for it. The housing was of good quality, although poorly maintained, and there were always cultural activities going on in the area. St Leonards had made the transition from a monoculture to a slightly more diverse society and things were really picking up in the years before the recession. There were accessible markets for residents, good economic activity and funding for projects. In more recent times, since 2014, St Leonards has changed quite dramatically with lots of new people, shops and cultures moving in. People have gone and have been displaced elsewhere, I don't think close by as I no longer see these people, so I don't know

really know where they have been displaced to. The future will likely see the process of gentrification spreading. Styles will change in future and traditional residents' interests will be reflected much less. Longer standing community and charity groups will be slowly eroded into insignificance, which will result in longer-term residents being listened to even less than they are now. Double standards will become stronger and poorer people will continue to be treated differently, and with suspicion

(especially younger people), whilst richer communities will continue to be rewarded. The two sets of community identities will continue to clash and won't be connected. The idea of progress will not bring improvement, which I like, but it will mean higher house prices, which will become an increasing problem, just like the house price bubbles have caused in other places I have lived in, like Brighton, Worthing and London.

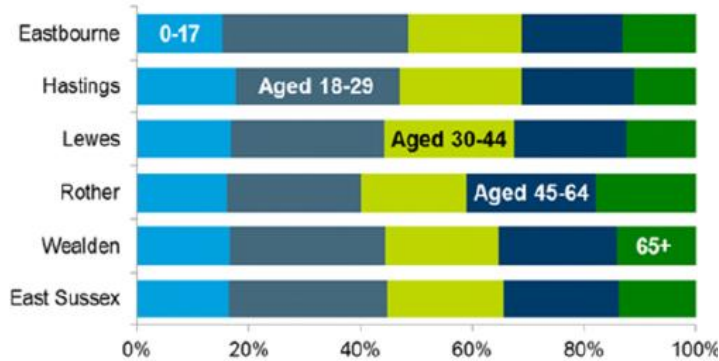




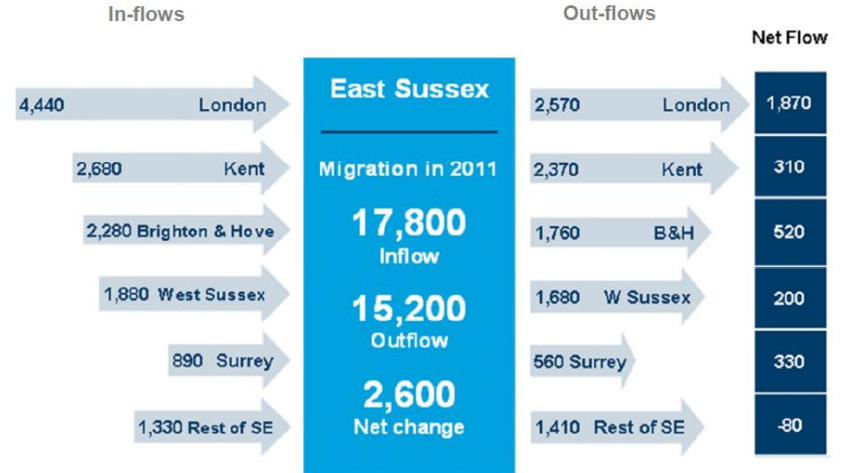
4. Has Gentrification come to Town? The vital statistics

Immigration figures

Percentage of gross migrant flows by age group in 2016



Top inflow and outflow migration to and from East Sussex in 2011



Figures obtained by East Sussex County Council on where inward migration to Hastings in coming from outlines how these residents tend to be younger, more affluent individuals who are moving in from London, Kent, West Sussex and Surrey areas.

The nation suddenly becomes interested

The battle for Hastings: Is it a dumping ground for the dispossessed or ripe for gentrification?

How should we think of this faded coastal town - and all the others like it? There's room for all sorts beside the seaside, discovers Hastings newcomer Tom Blass

Let's move to St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex Its fortune is ongoing, says Tom Dyckhoff

The battle continues in Hastings – for homes



Independent 2015

theguardian

Guardian Article 2012

The Telegraph

2017's best place to drink in the UK - the Crown, Hastings

Guardian Article 2016

the **guardian**

Should you move to St Leonards? Why I moved out of London to the south coast (I call it Happy-on-Sea)



The south coast is no longer where you go to die. But it is where you go to start a new life.

Journalist and urbanite Sally Brampton describes her new life in St Leonards

A magazine aimed at 50+ Urban/City people - 2014

Whenever you saw a national newspaper posting a story about St Leonards on Sea you braced yourself for the worst. Usually, some story would follow slating the area as a benefits on sea wasteland or would be highlighted as a deprived town needing saving by some new national policy. However, a greater number of news stories have been posted on national media sites stating that not only is this no longer the case, but suddenly St Leonards is the place to be. Indeed, national news has even given the area high ratings in travel guides and some have even dared to suggest that some of their urban readers' prices out, or fed up with, London should move to the town to reinvent themselves. It would appear for some reason, possibly due to higher prices people forcing people to cheaper coastal areas, St Leonards started to get a positive rebrand. This is a trend that was established by 2014/15 and became more common with each passing month.

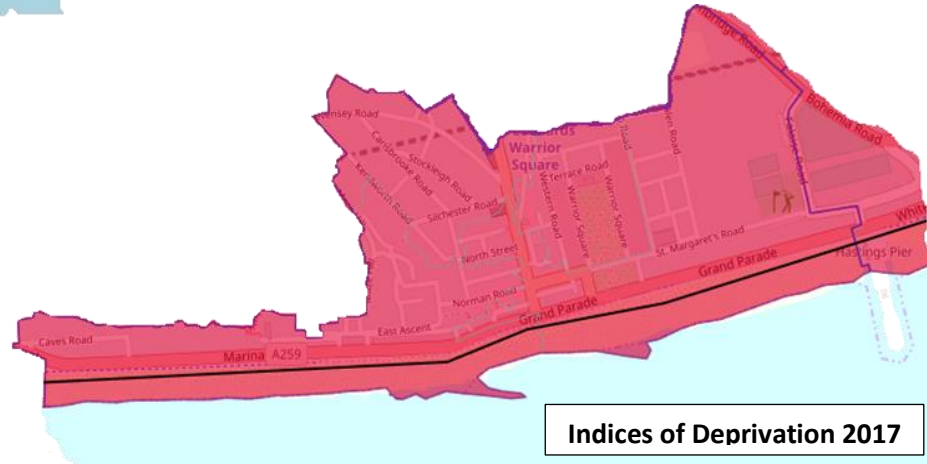
Indices of Deprivation 2010



shows that the area, although is still deprived compared to the UK and regional south east average, is not as deprived as it once was, possibly now moving into the 5 to 10% category rather than the bottom 5%. Again, this indicates wider social and cultural changes may be starting to change this area, in other words, Gentrification may be taking place.

Here we can see the change in deprivation in the area. In 2010 the map was a dark red colour, indicating the Central St Leonards area was consistently in the bottom 5% in terms of all deprivation when compared relatively across the UK.

Moving to 2017 we can see that the area has turned a lighter red colour. This



Indices of Deprivation 2017

<u>Indices of Deprivation Measure</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2016</u>
Average Deprivation Score	228	523
Average Income Score	0.22	0.397
Employment	0.187	0.337
Education	29.04	32.664
Health	58.6	92.4
Crime	10023	21026
Housing	12974	16817
Living Barriers	190.05	373
IDACI – Child Deprivation figure	0.289	0.494

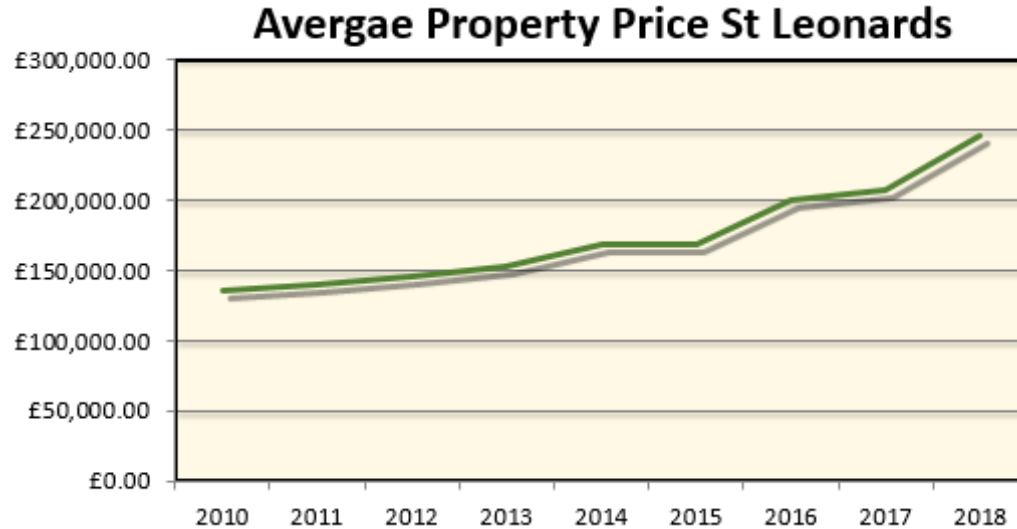
The figures show that on the average measure of the indices of deprivation the area is relatively less deprived compared to other areas within Hastings and the UK than was the case 5 years ago, highlighting the stark change that has occurred during the time Trendification took place.

5%+

5A-C

There has been improvement in attainment levels in recent years, allowing the area to close in on the national average, making it less relatively deprived than it was just 5 years ago. It would suggest that the children of the newer residents moving in might be helping to increase the average figure, suggesting that the people moving in may be more affluent and middle-class as the data does show that children from such parents tend to do better.

House Prices



+44%
-39%

House prices used to be significantly under the UK average, however, around the same time Trendification started so too did the rapid rise in house prices. A greater number of houses started to be put up for sale and this further increased as prices started to go up. Before we knew it, some roads were experiencing sales nearly double (44%) the typical value a house would probably have been sold for as few as 5 years ago. However, it should also be noted that there has been a 39% decrease in the number of houses deemed as “non-decent dwellings”, indicating that people moving are indeed renovating the area’s long-neglected properties.

Simon

Questions



Are you a local, if not, what brought you to St Leonards?

I moved down to St Leonards in 2013 and bought a property in Pevensey Road. I have not always been local, initially, I lived in the North London area and I moved from Hampstead, actually Belsize Park, to come to St Leonards. Three factors brought me down to the area. Firstly, I had former London friends and family living here, which would mean I would be able to move into the area without too many worries. Secondly, I had other former London contacts who had told me positive things about the area. Finally, the cheapness of the area compared to places in North London I had lived was a huge factor in deciding to move down.

How do you earn your living now? How have you been involved in the community?

I have always been involved in the art scenes, particularly in the music scene where I have played in a few bands, most notably the Higson's. I have worked in music in a variety of ways for many years, including

working for the BBC. For a time I worked with The Guardian newspaper coming up with headlines for people's Soulmates dating adverts- Tequila Mockingbird was a memorable one, but sadly it's all online now. When I moved into St Leonards I soon began making contacts in the local cultural scenes and I soon began to organise live gigs, concerts and shows for local galleries to help promote the growing cultural scene. Having organised several promotional events I developed an extensive network in the local cultural scene, which gave me a marketable portfolio I could use to apply for emerging jobs in the sector. As the Kino expanded from a small gallery into a larger abandoned warehouse next door in 2015 I was offered a job in organising live entertainment at the Kino, especially music events. This is when I would say things really started to kick-off for the local area.

What was St Leonards Like? How has the area changed over time? What do you think these changes are, trendyfying or gentrifying?

St Leonards use to be considered an undesirable place to live and had developed a reputation as a land of HMOs owned by slum landlords. The area was associated with major social problems, some of which were based on fair assumptions; others were unfair and greatly overstated. The economy was seen as in dire straits and only able to cater to the very bottom of any market. Even the arts scene was considered underdeveloped, despite its huge potential and great location.

There have been a lot of changes since 2013 when I moved into the area. There has been a huge image change to the area and this has mainly come through younger people moving in. Large HMO buildings, at least on some roads, seem to have been sold

on and younger families, often coming from London and Brighton, appear to be moving into larger flats or even purchasing the entire building. I think before a lot of people either once had children, or had chosen not to, and now these people are selling their places to younger families to make a lot of money. As a result, I feel that the local population is becoming younger and this has changed the culture of the place quite a bit. I have heard rumours now that family housing in the central St Leonards area is increasingly harder to come by because of this trend has rapidly increased in the last year or so.

I also think people in their 30s and 40s are moving down to try and recapture the cultural life they lost or feel they cannot get in London. The money you can make on selling your property can allow you time to engage in the cultural activities they used to do in their youth. Many people try to get jobs and make it professional in cultural industries, especially the music and acting industry, but it often does not work out and with city financial pressures a lot go into professions and jobs they did not want to really be in. By moving into a more affordable area, they have the time and finances to be able to pursue such a career or have the time to enjoy doing it as a hobby again. If you did this in London people might judge you as a dropout or a failure, whereas in St Leonards with so many fellow cultural types people will not judge you and more likely find you interesting, thus making it easier for such people to fit into the local community and socialise with people. This affordable lifestyle choice I think is driving the change of urban younger artistic families, and people, moving into the area.

In terms of the recent changes, I think the main changes have been cultural. By this I mean there are far more art galleries, music, film and drama venues on offer each year. On top of this, you also have greater diversity in food and live events. Although

there was a local economy for this when I arrived here it was not as big as it is now. This has been one of the largest growing industries but it is not moving “upmarket” like some claim, the economy is still chasing what I call the “St Leonards Fiver”. Most businesses offer cultural products and events for around £5 - £10, or a little bit over this, meaning the market price has not changed, but the diversity of what is on offer has changed. Places offering higher-end items tend to have staying power as there are not enough people with a high income to sustain high-end product businesses. Yes, I think this is representative that at the moment “cultural colonialism” does not work in St Leonards. Many people that move into the area feel like they need to give the London culture to St Leonards, almost as some sort of charity, but these people quickly find out that this attitude simply does not have an impact in St Leonards and it does not get them anywhere. I think this attitude fails as people do not realise the arts scene in St Leonards was developed before even I got here and has developed a lot in recent years, meaning there is not a huge need for more development. From my experience in holding events for businesses in the area, I would argue what works best are arts scenes that cater for local theatres as it offers both what locals want to see and also what new arrivals from London could not get, it offers a unique arts scene that appeals to a wide-ranging audience. I think people moving in have learnt to enjoy different cultures, rather than enforcing urban ones onto a seaside town with its own distinct culture. It offers what other places are not offering and manages to work on a financial level whilst still chasing the St Leonards fiver economy, so overall the economic changes have been cultural, but not as dramatic as the demographic or housing changes have been.

Finally, briefly describe St Leonards on sea in the past, in recent and what you expect it to look like the future.

St Leonards was worse off than it is now, it has been partly regenerated for sure. The recent times should be seen as the golden years for St Leonards, as it likely won't last. At the moment you have a developing exciting economy, which is affordable to both local and new arrivals, but I feel this will change in time. The higher house prices will attract people with more money and this will likely drive the economy into the higher commodity end of the market as these businesses will generate a higher profit and will be more sustainable. From this, people will likely be pushed out to make way for more speculative ventures. I think this will build up some people's resentment and this may be starting to happen with some shop windows, especially ones that represent change, have been smashed. I think you will see more property speculation adverts go around the local area and house prices will become less affordable and eventually will peak and crash at the higher end of the market that is developing in the town as people scramble to get out of their failed speculative property ventures. Basically, if you are not already involved in the cheaper property investment bubble you have missed the boat, you should have got here 10 years ago, the bargains have all now gone. For this reason, I don't think St Leonards will turn into a second home place or a holiday let town as the people who have moved are settling down deep roots, especially those with younger families and businesses. Basically, people will move here because they want to now.

If this does not happen then the economy probably won't be sustainable in the long run due to the lack of economic support in the town. Brighton's influx of creatives made it a success because there were local high paying jobs along with a long-term investment strategy that made economic development sustainable in the long run, sadly Hastings does not have this. If you look

at the local uni closing down, or the Pier economically not succeeding, along with the low wage economy and a lack of clear strategy for investment by the local council I can't see enough regular incomes sustaining the higher-end development that is taking place. I think like all seaside town development it will go in waves and at the moment we are at a high point. In the future, there will be a dip, but if people stick around then with the solid cultural base a new wave of development could start again. The question is when will the boom end, and how long will the bust last? Brexit could be a factor; the uncertainty is already affecting the local economy. At some point there will be a buffer and prices will be unaffordable for many people, so I can't see the boom lasting, but I hope these golden years continue for as long as they can.

In terms of the future for me, I don't want to move back to London, and I don't think others will either. Also, if the economy did tank people would not be able to, they would be stuck outside London like long-term locals have been for decades. The cultural change will last and it will only keep developing as well as it has done from 2013 to now, but I feel the golden days of the economy are here today and we should enjoy it whilst it lasts.

Before



After



5. When Houses Started Changing

As someone growing up in central St Leonards I always knew we had some grand Victorian housing, originally built for very wealthy families, but was equally aware the maintenance of much of this housing was very poor. Quite often, houses would be divided up into multiple flats, sometimes 6 flats within a single building, with many conversions badly done with repainting and repair jobs often just ignored.

With lots of large buildings that were rented and multiply occupied, commonly known as HMOs, the area attracted landlords and tenants operating at the budget end of the market, with many flats rented to people reliant on benefits, or with medical issues, including those with mental health problems and with drug and drink dependency issues.

This has been the case for a long time, certainly since the end of mass seaside holiday tourism in the 1970s. Though, around 2013/14 I noticed a change as more housing units began to be bought and repaired, looking a lot more upmarket and trendy than had traditionally been the case. This was the beginning, the first wave of changes in the area, that unbeknown to me at the time would later become visible trendification.

Here we now look at a few examples of those recent changes on roads that have seen the highest level of improved housing maintenance and artistic upkeep. Carisbrooke Road, the bottom of Kenilworth Road, Gensing Road, Pevensey Road, Shephard

Street, North Street and the Marina, all of which have seen a stark transformation in the maintenance of housing in recent years.

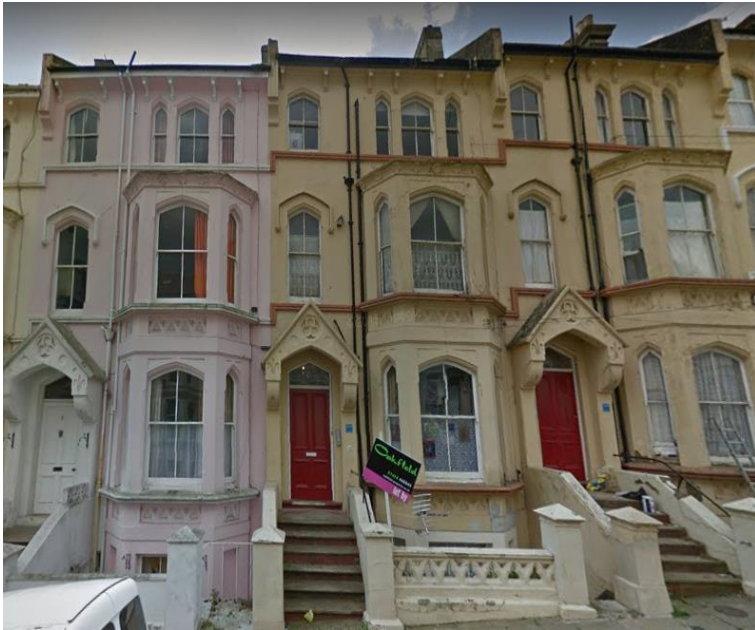
Before



After



Before



After



Before



After



Jon Clements: M & W: Local estate agent owner.



Are you a local, if not, what brought you to St Leonards? I grew up in Hastings, went to a school in Robertsbridge and later attended Hastings College. After leaving college I got into working in the City and later became a Stockbroker. I stayed in the city for a long time and was quite successful in the parts of the market I worked in. I learned a lot and decided to look for business ownership opportunities for when I would leave the city.

What was St Leonards Like? I stayed in the town as I always have felt the town has something really good going for it. It has always had great property, a mix of people and a sense of fun about the place. It just needs regeneration, which is occurring now.

How do you earn your living?

When I turned 40 I decided I had had enough of working in the city and started to work in Hastings. Initially, I set up my own commodity trading business and business was going fairly well. However, around 2013 I noticed that the property market was quickly changing in the St Leonards area and decided to take a calculated risk by setting up an estate agents business on London Road. The shops at the start of London Road were all empty and consequently very cheap, so I decided to set up the business in this very central location. Also, I noticed the empty shops were on the right side of the road, the one that caught the sun, which meant that on bright days people would walk down this side of the road when going to the seafront area. This would mean higher footfalls and more people noticing the great properties that were coming onto the market. By 2014, the St Leonards property market really started to take off and this is when the business started to boom. House prices started to rise and although there were a few rough streets that did not see the rises we are seeing now there were enough streets to start the changes we have seen. The people moving in were starting to make investments in their property, understanding the real value of assets many people had been sitting on for decades, which has seen house prices rise further, and which has meant the people moving in has changed too. The economics is quite simple. People sell a small place in London for around £350,000K, the lower end of the market in many cases, and then buy a nice place here from much less and have leftover money. They use this to invest in their new businesses, or simply live off the profits whilst they either find work or set up projects they are interested in. This has created lots of economic activity, which a business like mine earns their living from.

How has the area changed over time? What do you think these changes are, trendyfying or gentrifying?

Before the area was mostly the same old St Leonards society. Yes, you had people with social and drug problems hanging out on street corners, but mostly the area was a vibrant and diverse place. Most people were trying to improve the area. The dramatic change has been with the new type of people moving in, and the investments they have made alongside the businesses they have set up. The change has broadly been due to economics. From our experience of selling houses in the last two years, we have seen large changes in people moving in, and we have a 20% to 80% ratio of local to non-local buyers. Our business adapted to these changes by focusing on our local message. We started to realise that the biggest selling point around housing in this part of town was the local lifestyle living this area could provide. The town is a culturally diverse and vibrant place, with good sunny weather most of the year around. The people are nice and friendly and the small nature of the town has created a connected community with similar interests, for example, the large number of artists forming creative hubs in the town centre. This has great appeal to people moving down from London, especially if they have been forced out due to property price increases, as they can have a familiar culture and lifestyle to one they have been used to in their earlier lives.

These people moving in have had economic impacts, as their spending power is quite great, considering the amount of surplus they may have got from selling their London homes. The shop styles started to change quite quickly, in a positive way. The look of many shops started to improve and the town became more economically appealing. Most of the old shops have now gone and they have been replaced with much better shops that have more to offer the area, and have a much better chance of

staying open, decreasing the chances of empty shops being created. The most common change has been the creation of new bars, restaurants and coffee shops, I am a big fan of St Leonards and what it has to offer now.

From my experience, this is not gentrification. I am not aware of any increase in second homes, it is not a big issue we have come across, and we have not sold loads of second homes from our experiences. At least 90%+ of people stay in the area, they are not buying and then moving on to make a quick profit, they are mostly settling here and making investments in the area. The supply of housing is also not a huge problem. Some people that say they take supply out, but we are not directly involved in this. We take good housing stock from all over St Leonards, and increasingly the wider area, as we want to continue to promote very high-value housing stock as the area has so much to offer, we won't devalue the brand.

Finally, briefly describe St Leonards on sea in the past, in recent and what you expect it to look like the future.

As for future changes, I can't see the change slowing down, only continuing as the property market grows as more people move out from London. There is still plenty of good housing stock in the area, and although prices have risen in recent times they started from one of the lowest bases in the country, resulting in still affordable prices for people moving in from Brighton and London. Business has been really good in recent times and we have had to move across the street to a bigger shop to accommodate the increasing flow coming through our shop. Some people have suggested that this was about replacing the old betting shop in order to drive out the longer-term traditional residents. It is totally not about this; the area still provides a

market for these people. If you look across the street there are corner shops, and other shops that continue to offer a market people happily engage with. In fact, you could argue that people coming down to the area want these communities to live side by side, as they enjoy the cultural and edgy nature of the town centre, which is part of the lifestyle they have chosen to buy into. The place is a beacon for the positives of immigration, as the town does offer different things to different people, whilst also having accepting and positive views of different peoples.

I think that some peoples' anxieties about the change will only get stronger as the changes continue to develop at the rapid pace we have seen in the last two years. I think some people don't want to hear or talk about the changes that are taking place, they don't appreciate the straight-talking nature of myself and don't want to hear opinions on how this has been good for the local area. I think some are slowly coming around to the change, but it will take time. I think people fear they will be pushed out of the town and their homes, but the two different economies do meet together at some point and the market will continue to offer different things to different peoples. I can understand both points of view and where the different markets are coming from, the truth is that there is a place for both peoples and markets in the town and the community needs to come together to work through the suspicion and distrust the two different viewpoints have against each other.

How have you been involved in the community?

My involvement with the wider community was never planned or intended. Initially, I just planned to set up the business and see how it would develop. However, as the business grew and I could see the area improving around me I felt that getting involved with the wider community would be beneficial. I initially became involved with the town team community group and the amount of goodwill the shop has received from the local community has been very heart-warming indeed. The community group developed out of common frustration that the council, who had been doing some very good work in the area (such as with the ghostbusters policy), was now not doing that much. We wanted to help create the local town's success so we arranged events, along with social media and marketing campaigns. The community group has done a lot to bring investment into the town, such as better funding for the St Leonard's festival. I don't think the local council fully understood how the town's success became so big without their continued intervention. I think it was a case of local people just having a better understanding of how the area could be developed. I use to be the target of criticism, but now people mainly offer praise for the work that I have done in the community. I appreciate the positive comments and I have learnt not to bother too much about the negative ones.



The new expanded M&W premises, which formerly was a betting shop. Sadly, the shop window has been targeted and smashed a few times (with some suggestion it is politically motivated by those angry with local changes), but recently home office funding has secured window shutters to protect the windows.

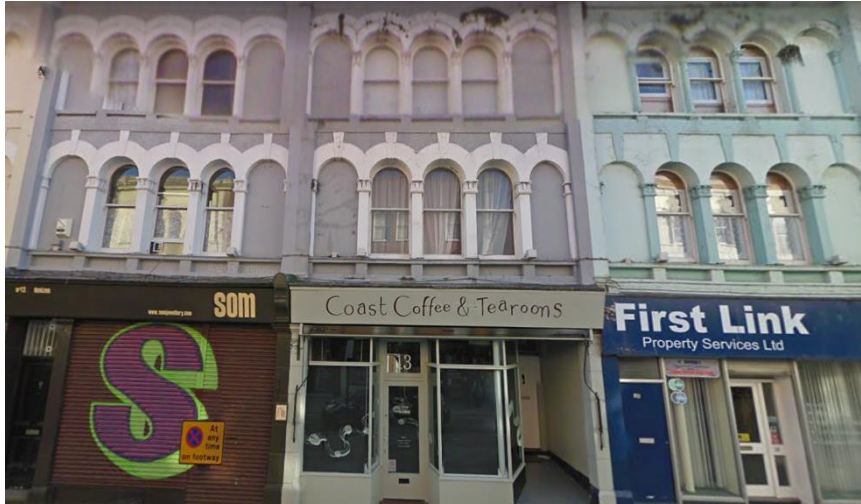
6. When Shops Started Changing

There is a hotly contested debate surrounding gentrification that questions if the economic changes that occur are devastating to communities or helps them to recover. However, we argue that trendification is mainly a beneficial economic process, which comes about through changes in the resident population and its key demographics. We argue that the people moving into deprived areas like St Leonards are not concerned with ousting long-term residents, but rather want to take pride in their newfound local community, wishing to make it safer and more presentable in order to create a boost to reputation and economic recovery that the entire community will benefit from.

We argue that there are many positive changes to see in the local economy during this period, including:

- Far fewer empty retail units on high streets.
- A broader range of shops and services, including galleries and eateries that feed into a night-time economy.
- Improvements to the shop fronts themselves, recreating some of the grandeur of the past.
- New street markets that emerge on high streets and further support local economies.
- Existing shops can start trading on the higher end of the market. For example, antique shops make a strong comeback.
- A greater presence of ethnic and cultural diversity.
- Greater economic activity, with more shops acquiring staying power.

Before



After



Matt & Rob: Half-man, Half Burger Directors

What brought you to St Leonards?



We started our business as a pop up in Brighton in 2014, where we are originally from. Initially, we used social media to highlight 'pop up' events we would be attending and we quickly gained a following. We noticed high returns and saw much potential for the business model we had. We decided that our business model could be affordable in the Hastings area and we asked people we knew in the area about good places to set up a new start-up food business. We initially thought of the Old Town, but soon were told not to go there as it has been over-invested in and has much higher rental prices. We decided to invest in St Leonards as we wanted to be the first new start-up to utilise the economic potential the area had. This was in 2015. We identified several empty units that were being sold at a cheap price, and with very low market rents. One of these was a curry house, which was cheap and already had an A3 license, meaning we could start selling food as soon as we opened.



We were new to the food business world, having worked in London and Brighton, mostly in the music sector, but we decided to buy the unit as we knew what we wanted to do, felt it would work and was something that would be beneficial to the regeneration of the area. We strongly felt there was nothing like our business model in the area and this convinced us that this was the location to invest in. We also felt the area had a great opportunity for new start-up ideas, had community support behind our idea and would allow for our unique brand to be brought to life. It was a combination of this change in the community, the location and the affordable state of the market that was key in enabling the start-up to become an established business in St Leonards.

As we were establishing our business, the money we saved on the cheaper unit prices was put into creating the brand and the interior design that would make us stand out. We felt our design would appeal to the local community that was turning out in large numbers to help us get started. I think that people appreciated us creating something more modern on an old declining high street with just one café' on it. From the businesses' perspective, we are quite proud in our regeneration of a good old fashioned business unit into something that can be an asset to the high street, like it was before the recession.

Now I look back on our decision I realise that it had to be St Leonards. St Leonards needed regeneration and our vision always had the potential to do this. We needed to be on this side of the town, and looking back on it exploring the Old Town made little sense for our start-up. The location has a beautiful view, attracted tourists and locals walking about and a place like this gave people somewhere to go.

What was St Leonards Like? & How has the area changed over time? What do you think these changes are, trendyfying or gentrifying?

The area, although it had great potential, was quite empty. For example, there was little on the particular part of the parade we are located on. After we created our business we became a community restaurant where local people came and met, and really helped us make the business a success. On top of this, the local community, through word of mouth, spread the good news about the improvements to the area and we have seen some customers from Brighton, Kent and London come down. However, we are still primarily a locally based food outlet.



We feel that this level of community support and our success has encouraged others to follow their own creative ideas. It has shown others that there was still a market in St Leonards and this may have been a catalyst for change in getting others to take a risk and invest in the area. The High Street started to fill its empty spaces and attract more economic activity to the area, with more start-ups soon followed, such as Goat Ledge and Saint Chicken. Most importantly, grants from Let's Do business really helped fund new ideas and regenerate the area, helping businesses in the area generate revenue and enabling some of us to expand. For example, we have been able to open up a second shop in Eastbourne. These investments have been crucial in starting a regeneration process. The Council have also helped increase funding to secure the trend towards regeneration as well. On top of all these investments, community support has been crucial in creating these first steps towards the regeneration of the St Leonards High Street, which is what I think is happening now.

Finally, briefly describe St Leonards on sea in the past, in recent and what you expect it to look like the future.

I think we are just at the start of the regeneration process. There is a long way to go yet before we can claim the place has been regenerated. There are many people being priced out of places like London and Brighton and these people have good ideas that could be encouraged and invested in. Moreover, people from these areas sometimes have businesses priced out of the area,

outcompeted by people with much more money and investment. We should be taking these businesses and putting them in more affordable units in places along the high street that still need to be regenerated. Also, I come across good ideas people in St Leonards have, they just need the help to start up their businesses. I feel the council could do more, making it easier to obtain A3 food licences. There is a national trend in the high street away from retail and towards food outlets like mine. The council should be more flexible and allow more food units and this is where investment could be placed successfully. If the council could be more proactive and give out more of these licences, and do it quickly, then we might capture more of the market fleeing unaffordable places like London and Brighton. This would help us continue this trend towards regeneration. Securing this investment from these places is the only way to create long-lasting jobs and investment and the best way to make the regeneration secure and permanent. There is still a long way to go before we are at the stage where we can attract these businesses fleeing London and getting investment for new start-up ideas, particularly focusing on the national trend towards food outlets. However, if we can I think the regeneration would continue all the way to being complete.

Before



After



Before



After





This book is dedicated to Ron Cook, a local resident and activist who volunteered at many community events around St Leonards. His area of expertise was supporting live events, and he worked hard to ensure that local events were professionally organised and properly stewarded.

He also campaigned for better training and rewards for volunteers and was on our list of local people to interview. Sadly, he was taken seriously ill as our book journey began and we were unable to secure his take on the dramatic local change before his unexpected passing.

Ron was a vital volunteer and community champion for the town who worked hard to improve the area. He is much missed.

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The Authors.



Chris Connelley – Chris moved to Hastings in 2011 from London and worked with Hastings College, teaching and helping students with their UCAS applications. Chris currently works with Eastbourne & Lewes Borough council in the heritage and conservation departments and currently is doing a PhD in gentrification in coastal towns at the University of Sussex. Chris has used his PhD work and knowledge of gentrification to create this book and the concept of Trendification.



James Prentice - James was born and raised in the St Leonards area. James attended local schools and has seen the area of St Leonards change. James has gained a Masters Degree in public opinion and is currently a PhD political science researcher based at the University of Sussex. James' work focuses on public opinion research and analysis of data, of which he applied to the creation of this book. He also utilised his hobby in photography to take the pictures seen in this book.