

THE NOVEMBER MEETING

Two Speakers - 18th November 2002

TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT

MIKE WEBB, Manager

Reported by Tessa George

MIKE WEBB EXPLAINED that Town Centre Management is a government initiative but it has its own constitution and on the Board are members of the Town Council, the Dover District Council, Kent County Council, the Dover Society and the Chamber of Commerce, with support from other organisations, including the Dover Harbour Board, Sea France, P&O and Boots. Thus it is a mixture of the public and private sector.

He told his audience that when he took up the position as Town Centre Manager he had never worked in local politics and he explained some of the difficulties of the job and gave examples of work done by the Centre in 2002.

The first was of providing funding for the Christmas lights in the town. Some of this came from SeaFrance and Dover Harbour Board and SALCO put the lights up, but it was all done on a shoestring, without sufficient money and the result was a disgrace. In spite of this, he said, we do have the biggest SWITCH-ON in Kent, where no money changes hands and staff from the Marlowe put on an all day kiddies' show. Terry Sutton commented that he had never seen so many people in the Market Square.

TCM opened the new Co-op superstore and were given their first cheque towards River Watch, the idea for which came from the Dover Society. At the same time they obtained the co-operation of the Co-op management to help keep the land clear

beside the B&Q site.

Mike was asked to open the children's event on that occasion by letting off balloons with all the children who attended the store on the Saturday afternoon. However, he had to decline because he was supporting the major Dover game on the same day, so they came up with the idea of letting off the balloons at the match between Dover and Oxford. There were two hundred balloons donated and TV and newspaper coverage of the event.

He said there was so much more that the TCM could do. One problem was that in the private sector they were dealing with an entrepreneurial spider that wants to be involved in everything as opposed to the public sector which runs on a hierarchical structure. The two structures, he said, were wholly incompatible, since the doers do not want to be controlled by rules and regulations. We do need, he thought, elected politicians to decide how much is going to be public and how much will be private. We need an enabling council. This was not, he stressed, a party political sentiment but was based on the fact that Dover Town Centre Management is the worst funded TCM scheme in the whole country. They have received £15,000 from Dover District Council (compared with Shepway who get £50,000) and £600 from the Town Council (compared with £10,000 in Shepway). When the TCM moved, the Town Council paid the rent for one year, £3000. When Mike talked to colleagues in Hastings he discovered that they received £30,000. He said that the TCM could not exist without substantive support. Things were likely to get worse because the District Council have indicated that they intend to cut core funding and pay instead for project

funding. He asked how they could apply for project funding if they did not get the core funding necessary to exist.

It made him sad to reflect that our town did not make use of its opportunities. He said 'it is a marketeers' dream. Who could ask for more, the beauty, the infrastructure, the castle, the people going past our front door, and somehow we cannot make a success of it. It's unbelievable.'

But, he said, there were changes afoot which gave cause for optimism. He had spoken to Bob Goldfield, the new Managing Director of the Harbour Board, to Nadeem Aziz, the new Managing Director of Dover District Council, who were both very positive. Another newcomer to the town is Clive Cook, the new principal of South Kent College, an enormously energetic person.

He went on to say that TCM must change its own direction. We have done a lot of populist things to raise money and if that is what the town wants then that is what TCM will continue to do; Christmas lights road show, pop groups playing, boat races on the Dour, Father Christmas on midsummer day giving out Easter eggs and the talent show which became a national attraction.

As well as these the Board decided we should focus on the key things which we do so well. The first of these is SHOP WATCH, which we introduced and for which we won an award. This grew out of Dover TCM initiative. We now have nearly 90 different companies on two-way radio and CCTV.

The next is RIVER WATCH to look after the beautiful River Dour and keep it clean, a project supported by the Dover Society for many years. The river is amazingly clean from an environmental point of view and there are trout in almost the whole length of it. What is needed is not just the occasional clean-up but an on-going system of care. Watch this space! The Co-op is already giving us financial and legal support. There is one problem.

We are unable to cut weed because of a rule of the Environmental Agency. One of the worst areas is outside 'Riverside' where the weed is rife and allows rubbish to collect.

Lastly there is another project for which we need a name. We do not want to call it SLUM WATCH, but that is what it is. We are trying to get errant landlords to clean up their properties. There are, of course, difficulties. Often it is not known who owns a property and they are protected by an Act of 1990.

He went on to say that TCM wants to work with the Town Council and he welcomed Councillor Drew, the first independent councillor. He ended by saying that the TCM has support from many sources who say it is a model. The latest example is an exclusive, in the form of a letter from HRH Prince Charles, who was aware of Mike's column in the 'Dover Express'.

LIFE IN DOVER DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

A summary of Derek Leach's talk

DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR Dover was in the front line with troops coming and going, both the fit and the wounded, the dead constantly being brought ashore from damaged and sunken ships to be laid out in the Market Hall, the warships and aircraft coming and going, and the efforts of the Dover Patrol to protect our shipping against U-Boats. This meant that Dover was also a target for bombardment both from the sea and from the air. The lives of ordinary Doverians changed out of all recognition.

The great new naval harbour had been completed five years earlier but was not prepared for war. It would have had no defence against the German Fleet if their