

Regeneration

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Following last issue's report we have received a response from Dover District Council on the use of powers available to them to enforce repair orders upon owners of neglected properties. The Council are trialling a scheme with three properties, regretfully none of which are in Dover. If successful the intention is, we understand, to "roll out their use across the district. This will of course include Dover Town as this is the centre of our regeneration aspirations." Dover more than other areas is run down and needs its buildings to look cared for and not neglected. A cared for look will not only lift our spirits but do wonders for tourism.

A related matter: On behalf of the Society I attended a meeting of the London Road Community Forum. The principle matter discussed was the state of the properties owned by Dover Municipal Charities situated from Bridge Street towards Beaconsfield Road on the right hand side. The buildings are used for shops and are, in several instances, sadly neglected but possessing facades that have some style and seem well worth improvement. The Forum have permission from the Charity to decorate empty premises and a grant from the Town Council to provide for materials. The purpose of the Charities attendance was to tell us of their intentions and the limitations on any action they may take in connection with the buildings. We were told that the conservation area status restricted the use allowed and imposed costs that rendered a conversion to charitable housing impractical. The cost of

new build is two thirds of the cost of restoration and conversion. I came away with the depressing thought that Dover will end up destroying much of its character because of poor regulation and a lack of money. Other wealthier towns would not think twice about making the best of such buildings. But well done London Road Forum!!

Looking at both issues Dover runs the risk of being regenerated but end up losing much of the buildings that give it its character and uniqueness. Do we want a Dover that is indistinguishable from any other town? I don't. I am not against good modern buildings; trouble is we do not seem to get very many built – certainly not in towns like Dover.

We have now started on a survey of our listed buildings and conservation areas. Our surveyors have been both impressed by the underlying quality of much of the building and examples of care and pride but depressed by the grotty. Our web site is being redesigned so that it is data driven which means that it will be much better suited to record the survey results. We should also be able to keep records updated with notes of improvements and of neglect. There should also be a facility for both members and the public to make their comments. The hope is that we shall all be able to be engaged and hence there may be many more lobbyists.

It is early days but I feel an excellent start has been made by some very committed members of the Society.