

The Dover Society AGM 2013

Report by the Chairman Derek Leach

The Chairman's report has been reproduced in its entirety so therefore some items or events will already have taken place - editor

Putting together my 9th annual report was a challenge - how to make it a bit different and even more interesting? Well, this past year was rather different for everybody with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations nationally and locally. We must congratulate our energetic member, Mike McFarnell, for his vision and determination to revive the Dover Military Tattoo as part of the celebrations. This was followed by the Olympic torch visiting Dover and the Olympic Games themselves with Team GB coming up trumps.

For the Dover Society it was in many ways a challenging year, having to consider several major issues affecting the future of the town and making reasoned, constructive and responsible responses.

It was also our 25th year as a Society and I hope that you found the special edition of the Newsletter with its potted history interesting.

Now my report:

Membership

First, I have to report a failure. This time last year to help celebrate our 25th anniversary I challenged members to increase our membership to 500, but we failed. Our membership continues to hover around 450 with a number of losses but some new members. Please

encourage relatives, friends and work colleagues to join. Our thanks as always go to our membership secretary, Sheila Cope.

Now may I invite you to stand whilst we remember those members who have died in the past year....

So what have we been up to?

Planning

On the planning front Patrick Sherratt and his committee continued to keep an eagle eye on routine planning applications and making representations to DDC when necessary.

We have continued to monitor progress or lack of progress on the various regeneration schemes. Whilst we were pleased to see progress on the Buckland Paper Mill Site and the relocation of the Visitor Information Centre to the Museum, no real progress has been made on the blighted St. James area following the approval of planning applications. Regarding redevelopment of the Connaught Barracks site, it is ironic that following its sale by the MOD, this department is now renting it back!

After attending two more consultations and submitting views, we welcomed the final version of DDC's Heritage Strategy, which we hope will strongly

influence consideration of future planning applications. We also submitted views on DDC's proposed allocation of sites for possible development up to 2026. Proposals for the River Dour cycle route through the town gave us a number of safety concerns.

Three major issues continued to stretch us: the future of DHB (although not strictly a planning issue), development on the Western Heights and at Farthingloe and health provision.

During the year DHB submitted its revised proposals to the Minister to take account of the government's revised criteria for privatisation. We submitted a number of reservations and after a long silence the Minister turned down DHB's scheme citing alternative ways to finance Western Docks redevelopment and insufficient community involvement in port development. Whilst retention of the status quo, at least temporarily, may be welcomed, it means that all the work undertaken by the community, including the Society, in preparation for the proposed Port of Dover Community Trust was wasted and the cash injection lost. We await any further developments.

Our initial reaction to proposals for housing on the Western Heights and at Farthingloe (in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) was that the Western Heights Ancient Monument should be protected; however, since private money appeared to be the only way to preserve and promote this valuable heritage asset, we should not close the door without considering some sensitive, limited development if there were a substantial gain for the Ancient

Monument that outweighed any drawbacks. Following consultations, the original proposals were substantially modified in the subsequent outline planning application submitted in July 2012. The Society could not support it, however, without a firm guarantee that the benefits for the Drop Redoubt were guaranteed as well as concerns over quality of materials and design. English Heritage opposed the application, but with DDC keen to regenerate the area, negotiations with the parties continue.

The long running saga of where to site any new health facility and what facilities to provide moved a step closer with a planning application to build a clinic, rather than a hospital, in the car park of Buckland Hospital and to dispose of the rest of the site for housing. In the absence of any alternative scheme we decided, albeit reluctantly, that we should not turn down more modern accommodation on offer, even though in our view it was in the wrong place with poor access on foot, by car and by public transport and that it did not provide for the present and future need of the community since it fell short of the facilities agreed in 2008 and there were no overnight bed facilities for intermediate care. Therefore, we made our support conditional upon: increasing parking spaces to not less than the present number; retaining surplus land for future expansion and facilities, in particular care beds; road access must be substantially improved; and the town centre clinic remains available to the community.

Refurbishment or making the best of what we already have in the town.

Our Refurbishment Committee, chaired by Jeremy Cope, continues to make an impact with its survey of the condition of our many listed buildings and conservation areas. Our campaign for zero tolerance of antisocial behaviour and litter dropping bore fruit with DDC adopting a zero tolerance policy which it implemented in February this year, but it was virtually stillborn since the private company to be employed primarily as enforcers was sacked. Consequently DDC's own staff managed to issue only one fine in the first month.

We have discussed with DDC its new waste collection system which has created some difficult storage problems resulting in eyesores in various parts of the town, but there are no easy answers.

Cooperative working between The Society, DTC and DDC resulted in a number of property owners in Castle Street improving neglected exteriors of properties. Folkestone Road is now the second phase of this campaign. Wetherspoons failure, after several years of ownership, to refurbish the former cinema attracted our wrath. On a brighter note we were pleased to see a vast improvement in the appearance of the Old Post Office in King Street and the splendid restoration, both inside and out, of Charlton House in London Road.

Constant urging of the authorities to reinstate public toilets on the seafront has also borne fruit at last with DDC, DTC and DHB combining to refurbish the toilet block opposite the Premier Inn.

We are still battling with KCC for an

easily accessible footpath to link the castle to Langdon Cliffs, but our efforts to repair Connaught Park pond may soon see it restored.

KCC has now activated our case for registering as a public right of way the path between Connaught Road and Godwyne Path. With the help and guidance of Peter Sherred of Bradleys Solicitors we applied for registration, which, if successful, would result in removal of the fence. 12 people have joined in the application, but if anybody else would like to act as a witness to its long term public use please speak to Jeremy.

A new member, Sylvie Parsons, now on the Refurbishment Committee, has shown us and the town with her Brighter Dover project how to get something done if you are really passionate about it. Mind you, she has the advantage of her French charm and nobody seems able to refuse her requests for money or help!

With the Olympics over, we discussed with DDC the removal of that blot on the Market Square - the big screen - but the cost would be substantial and cannot be justified in these years of austerity and so Dover is cursed for years to come with yet another eyesore. We shall keep trying.

Recently we welcomed the windfall for Dover of £1 million of lottery money to be spent over the next ten years on improving the town and the life of its people. As an amenity society we should participate fully by submitting possible projects and assisting in the local organisation. We don't want public apathy to blight this scheme known as Big Local.

Projects

One new project was started and concluded within the year when Jean Marsh and Terry Sutton catalogued a mass of documents and photographs inherited by Dover Town Council.

On the heritage front the success of Heritage Open Days in Dover continued with once again 10 properties open free of charge for the September weekend. We have also urged DHB to make the Admiralty Pier Victorian gun turret safe to open to the public and we are encouraged by the appointment of a suitable consultant to report on its condition.

Our long term project of restoring the Town Hall to something like its Victorian splendour in partnership with DDC and DTC came to a grinding halt with DDC officers unable to give it any time at all throughout the past 12 months. Despite this frustration, our gallant band of volunteers continued with guided tours of the building every Wednesday. To date we have attracted over 800 people from the town, the UK and overseas with income of £1250. You can now buy postcards of the magnificent stained glass windows and before long a much needed booklet on the building's 800 year history will be available, financed by the Society.

Another dedicated band of volunteers led by Jeremy Cope continued to maintain the whole area of Cowgate Cemetery with their fortnightly work parties and we still take a leading role in the River Dour Steering Group where, despite cuts in funding, monthly litter clearances continue enabled, at least for one more year, by financial assistance primarily from DTC. To assist grant applications for

funding we have agreed that this Group should come under the Society's 'umbrella' as a registered charity.

With requests for more Society blue plaques we have decided to add one of these expensive items every year. Having considered many suggestions we made an initial shortlist of three, the first being to commemorate composer Thomas Tallis's connection with St. Martin's Priory. The frustrating delay in erecting one in memory of Doctor Koettlitz on the newly restored Charlton House is not of our making.

More of the same

Now I turn to regular activities which are part and parcel of The Society and perhaps taken for granted, but no less important.

Social programme

Our winter series of meetings continue to be well supported and I thank Patricia Hooper-Sherratt, Patrick Sherratt, Sheila Cope, Mike Weston, the happy band of kitchen helpers and Denise Lee our new Queen of the Raffle, for all their hard work. Our summer outings were well supported and encouraged by this Patricia has an ambitious programme for this coming summer.

The experimental changes to our traditional Christmas Feast were a big success. Moving to a different venue, earlier in December and at lunchtime meant that we were oversubscribed. So this year we are moving to a larger venue - the Town Hall.

Publicity

Our Newsletter expertly edited by Alan Lee continues to be highly regarded and we are indebted to all the

contributors, Jean Marsh our advertising manager, the Proof readers, the envelope stuffers and all our distributors for their efforts. The excellent website, managed by Mike McFarnell keeps members up to date and helps to interest internet browsers not only in the Society but in Dover as well. Terry Sutton's regular press reports also help to keep The Society in the public eye and we continue to provide a Dover Society article in the Dover Life magazine. Moving with the times we have also acquired two fine pop-up advertisements; Mike McFarnell is even urging us to join Facebook and to start tweeting!

Representation

As usual I represented The Society at the moving St. George's Day commemoration of the Zeebrugge Raid and we also laid wreaths at the Remembrance Services at the Town war memorial and at The Society's plaque to the Unknown Warrior at the Western Docks. As Chairman I was also an official guest at the Olympic Torch festivities.

Thanks

In my report I have mentioned a number of people, but have not referred to that essential backroom boy, our efficient treasurer, Mike Weston, who will shortly dazzle you with his annual accounts. That concludes my report of a very hectic year for The Society except for thanking every member of the Executive, including Di French who resigned during the year and Bill Naylor who, having served since 2001, is not seeking re-election which means a change of Secretary, but I am pleased that Patricia is prepared to take on the job. I also thank our Audit Committee

and all those members who have contributed in any way to the work of The Society.

Just one final plea - your Executive, with one or two exceptions, is aging rapidly and we can't go on forever. We need fresh, younger blood. If this description fits you then please consider putting yourself forward before age gets you as well!

I submit my report for your consideration.

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Letter to the Editor



Dear Editor

For many years as a member of the Flag Institute I have promoted good flag flying in Kent. In Britain there is so little pride it is an uphill task. I wish to start a Kent Flag Trust (or similar) to promote good practice and offer help and grants for people to fly our flags. Anybody who shares my concern please do get in touch. I have been a member for seven years.

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