JANUARY MEETING

1st Speaker

Dover Town Centre Project

A Talk by JohnAngell, Simon Crowley and Neil Wiggins

Reported by Terry Sutton

Approx. 65 members of The Dover Society and guests in January were given an update of ambitious proposals to provide an attractive link between the St James' redevelopment and the existing town centre. Giving latest details of the scheme were three of the five directors of the Dover Town Team-chairman and jeweller John Angell, estate agency boss Simon Crowley and Neil Wiggins who is one of the two community directors on Dover Harbour Board.

The other two directors are Councillor Sue Jones, who we were told initiated the project, and Councillor Trevor Bond who is a member of the senior management of local hotels.

John Angell kicked off by explaining there were fears that the St James' development would suck trade out of the existing Dover town centre so something was required to attract shoppers and others from St James' into the main street via the Market Square.

He told of the finance obtained from various sources and the progress of various projects including the running of the Tuesday main street market.

Simon Crowley followed by telling of the very hard work in getting funds to improve the town and gave a sorry description of some of the out of town owned main street properties where the façade looked reasonable but, in several properties, investment was required internally.

The Town Team's efforts to get these out-of-town owners to improve their properties had largely failed, he said, leaving the Town Team to try to do so.

Simon revealed that owners of some town centre shops were offering leases at zero rent but that did not get over the cost of the

business rate. It was unfair, he argued, that under the new business rate assessments the cost was going down for some big companies such as Tesco while the assessment was increasing for smaller town centre premises such as La Salle Verte.

He expressed optimism about aspects of the future. "We are on the cusp of things happening in Dover, some of which we may not want, but we are determined to make the best of what is available," he said.

Neil Wiggins' [the third speaker] task was to look to the future as he displayed sketches of the Town Team's vision for the upgraded Market Square. He explained the Town Team's bid for finance, to carry out the Market Square work, to the Dover Coastal Community on which the team served.

Neil revealed the team's original costings for the upgrade and reshaping of the Market Square to be in the region of £1. 85 million but this has been re-estimated by the appropriate government department at £3.14 million!

Town Team, he reported, has successfully reached an advanced stage in its bid for the Market Square finance and a final decision could be expected in mid-March.

They would then be running on a very tight deadline given only 14 months, from the time of being granted the funding, to start and finish the complete project.

He detailed some of the proposed changes to the lay-out of the Market
Square which, he said, they intended to make as a venue for a series of community events.

One of the ideas was a large water feature onto which, using lasers, would be displayed Ghosts of Dover features telling the history of the town. The bus stop for the cruise ships' passengers would be re-positioned so that the visitors were better placed for the town's heritage centre. Upgraded access, via Flying Horse Lane and Fishmongers' Lane, would provide improved pedestrian links between the St James' development and the Market Square.

One major ambition, for the future, was to provide better access, across the "Roman Lawn" from the Market Square to the Roman Painted House. This could possibly entail excavating and open up the Roman bath house below the lawn. But before that there would be archaeological research to ensure there was no hidden historic artefacts.

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