

APRIL AGM MEETING

The Dover Society AGM 2017

Report by the Chairman Derek Leach

This is my 13th annual report some of you have had to listen to and still you come back for more!

Membership

Our membership has dropped from 480 to 463 which is disappointing. Please encourage encouraging relatives, friends and work colleagues to join. It's good for Dover and excellent value for you with no increase in subscription since 1996? Our thanks as always go to our membership secretary, Sheila Cope.

Also, we do desperately need some new faces and fresh blood on our committees. Hopefully, this will be partially remedied this evening. May I invite you to stand whilst we remember all those members who have died in the past year: Mr Peter Franklin, Mr John Marsh, Mrs Rita Donnelly, Mr Bryan Cope, Mr Bill Naylor, Mr John Mavin, Mr Alan May, Mrs Dorothy Hall, Mrs Angela Gibbins, Dr Walter Mason, Mr Jim Williams, Mr Richard Liggett, Mr Hugh Gordon, Mrs Audrey Thorn.

So what have we been up to?

As always your Executive and sub committees have been very active trying to conserve and promote our heritage, improve the quality of life for those living now and participating in all that is going on to regenerate our town for the future. We are heavily involved in various project groups and forums such as the: Port and Community Forum, Town Centre Development Group, Town Hall Project

Steering Group, Coastal Communities Fund Team and White Cliffs Country Tourism Association.

Despite all the cynicism that exists in Dover, albeit justified based on past experience, I am pleased to say that at long last things are looking up on a number of fronts - regeneration and development, tourism promotion, cultural and entertainment activities. Some provided by business but others by enthusiastic volunteers.

Planning and development

The Planning Committee, chaired by Patrick Sherratt, continued to keep an eagle eye on routine planning applications and making representations to DDC when necessary. We have also continued to monitor progress on the various regeneration schemes.

A notable success for The Society was in Castle Street where there have been a number of applications to change use from commercial to residential. We objected strongly to so many one bed flats in this conservation area which we considered would be detrimental to this attractive street.

The DTIZ or St James' area scheme has made rapid progress recently, but we are concerned about the impact the scheme will have on the High Street shops.

We are having talks with a Trustee of the newly-created Love Dover Trust which

aims to purchase town centre shop premises to improve them including conversion of upper floors to accommodation thus making them financially viable whilst upgrading the High Street area. A trustee will be addressing our October meeting.

The Western Heights/Farthingloe scheme is bogged down in a legal battle.

We still await a solution to the problems Dover suffers when ferry and tunnel operations are disrupted with Operation Stack in use. The government has made money available for a lorry park on the M20 for emergency and possibly general use and The Society has expressed its views on the options. We also await installation of the much delayed variable speed limit on the A20 rather than the frustrating fixed 40mph from the Roundhill Tunnel – now promised for June.

In our submissions on the proposed third Lower Thames Crossing we have once again urged the upgrading of the M2/A2 to reduce the traffic along Townwall Street.

We have lobbied long and hard for the multi-storey car park to serve Dover Priory only to find that it will now be ground level only and smaller. We have also commented on an updated Dover Transport Model to improve transport into and out of and within the town.

The new Buckland Hospital opened without any beds, but we continue to press for local intermediate beds despite the sale of adjacent spare land on the adjacent land. We are not convinced that local care homes are suitable without specialist staff and facilities for all ages.

We are also commenting on a series of planning applications which are part of the Whitfield Urban Extension with its many

new homes and facilities including a cemetery.

We continue to press the Port for quality buildings as part of the ambitious Western Docks Revival plans. Work has started on the navigation cut from the Wellington Dock into the harbour as well as on the Marina Curve and the new East Pier.

DDC has carried out an appraisal of the Waterloo Crescent Conservation Area and has recommended the extension of its boundary to include Granville Gardens and the Gateway Flats seafront gardens. We have welcomed this and also urged the inclusion of the De Bradelei Wharf buildings, although such an extension will not necessarily prevent future development.

We are also involved in considering a draft Waterfront Masterplan which aims to improve connectivity between the new waterfront created by the Western Docks redevelopment and the town centre and railway station. A decision is expected soon on the multimillion pound grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the restoration of the Town Hall to give it a sustainable future. The Society has pledged £10,000 from its Town Hall Fund as part of the local funding.

Several projects are being prepared for funding from the Coastal Communities Fund including one to refurbish and improve access to the Roman Painted House. A Dover Town Team project rejected by the Fund was for the Market Square area to provide an attractive link between the St James development and the town centre shops.

DDC's plans for a new Leisure Centre have caused concern. Whilst we strongly urged the council to build on a town centre

site for local ease of access, this has not proven possible and Doverians will have to go to Whitfield instead.

We strongly supported the Big Local initiative to improve tourism in the town by appointing a dedicated Dover tourism officer to coordinate all the local efforts to promote tourism. The Destination Dover Officer is now working with funding, both local and national, guaranteed for 5 years. Now the wild card in the pack! With local authorities facing no government grants at all by 2020 (40% of income lost and council tax capped) both county and district councils are considering how to survive and whether reorganisation is the answer. The 4 East Kent district councils of Dover, Shepway, Thanet and Canterbury have been considering merging into a single council and consultants have produced a business case. The Society has considered the business case and submitted its serious concerns to DDC. Of particular concern is the democratic deficit – such a council would be even more remote from residents with far fewer councillors and senior staff. Dover District in particular could face a 20% increase in council tax and any consequent devolution of some services to town and parish councils would need careful consideration in terms of resources and funding. Whilst DDC favours the plan, Shepway has decided against. We await any further developments.

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 lobbying for improvements to our town scene – litter, lighting etc. as well as the litter on the main roads into the town. We continue our regular meetings with the Dover police inspector. We also raised concerns about the decaying fabric of Old

St. James Church.

Society projects

On the heritage front the success of Heritage Open Days in Dover, organised by the Society, continued with once again 9 properties open free of charge for the September weekend. Our gallant band of volunteers continued with guided tours of the Town Hall every Wednesday plus several specially arranged group tours. Why not become a guide or at least act as a receptionist whilst our guides are busy. Have a word with Denise, Liz or me.

Our enthusiastic volunteers continued to maintain the whole of Cowgate Cemetery with their fortnightly work parties. More people would be welcome for light exercise, fresh air and convivial company.

Our collection of blue plaques throughout the town continues to grow with the addition of arctic explorer and botanist Dr. Koettlitz. The next will be Thomas Gould VC, a Second World War submariner.

The River Dour Group, part of The Society, is obtaining funds for eel and fish passes, volunteer river wardens and for publicising the river walk. The Bluebird Heritage Trail project, led by The Society, completed its very hectic 8 month delivery phase with a successful launch on 27 August. Since then the project has been evaluated and we were congratulated on achieving our objectives on time and within the £64k budget. Now we need to ensure that the trail is promoted both locally and via the Bluebird website to keep up interest. It forms part of the Destination Dover initiative and promoted as part of Dover's Walkers are Welcome.

More of the same

Now as usual I must mention the bread and butter activities, which are part and

parcel of The Society and easily taken for granted, but no less important.

Social programme

Our winter series of meetings continue to be well supported and I thank Beverley Hall and her happy band of kitchen helpers for all their work, Mike Weston our wine waiter and Denise Lee our Queen of the Raffle. Our Christmas Feast and Wine and Wisdom evening were again well supported and very enjoyable, as were our summer outings organised so well by Pat and Patrick Sherratt. Unfortunately, Pat and Patrick are having a hard time at the moment with Patrick's ill health. Thanks also to Alan Sencicle who arranges our pre-meeting meals for guest speakers as we don't offer fees for the honour of talking to The Society!

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. We are also on Facebook and Twitter. Terry Sutton's regular press reports also help to keep The Society in the public eye when the local papers choose to publish them.

Thanks

Two more backroom people we take for granted: that essential backroom boy, our efficient treasurer, Mike Weston, and Yvonne Miller, who has the thankless task of taking the Executive minutes and every other member of the Executive for their efforts.

Civic 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.

You will be pleased to hear, if you are still awake, that that concludes my report of yet another very busy year. I submit my report for your consideration and approval.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Sheila Cope

This year subscriptions have come in more slowly than usual and at time of writing there are still many outstanding. As ever my thanks go to those who pay promptly or by standing order so that reminders are kept to a minimum.

Inevitably we lose a percentage of members each year and it feels like running uphill to maintain the total which is 467 at present. Word of mouth is

always the best recommendation, so please do all in your power to attract new members. After all, we are fantastic value for money.

Welcome and recent new members include:- Mr J & Mrs S Yarrow, Mrs C Pierce, Mrs J Marks, Mrs J Simmons, Mrs J & Mr N Gould, Mrs Barbara Hall, Miss C Dendiro, Mrs J Easton.