

Planning Committee

Graham Margery

Chairman Planning Committee

At the last Annual General Meeting Pat Sherratt did not stand for re-election as chairman and member of the Planning Committee, meaning I now attempt to assume the mantle. Pat deserves much thanks for all the dedicated work that he has done, and I thank him for all the help he has given me as I prepared to take over the role. Thankfully, he continues to serve the Society on the Executive, so his experience and expertise is not lost.

With all the Covid restrictions the committee has not met physically but the business has continued through electronic communication. I again thank Pat and all the Planning Committee for their invaluable help and support with this very busy portfolio.

Since the last newsletter we have reviewed some 90 applications that are potentially of interest and made formal response to Dover District Council in respect of 24 of them. The Planning Committee is always pleased to receive comments and feedback from the members of the Society, who can let the Planning Committee know their views on any application, or on any development that may concern them. This will help form the official Dover Society response. Alternatively, they can lodge their views as an individual directly with the DDC Planning Dept. in writing or via the DDC Planning portal at <https://www.dover.gov.uk/Planning/Planning-Applications/Home.aspx>

Inland Border Facility: In the previous Newsletter I mentioned the proposed Inland Border Facility at a site in Whitfield adjacent

to B&Q and the new Leisure Centre. We have since responded to the public consultation and written again to the transport minister setting out our concerns about traffic disruption, noise and light pollution and the use of "White Cliffs" in the name of the facility. The reply, when it eventually arrived, was simply a standard letter that failed to address the specific points we raised and attempted to reassure us that everything possible would be done to minimise any adverse impact. The planned operational date of May 2021 will be missed and, as yet, no construction work has started. There is a faint possibility that in the light of our post-Brexit experience the facility may not actually be needed but I am not very hopeful.

Dover District Council Local Plan:

Thanks to Pat we submitted a formal response to the public consultation. The Local Plan is a crucial document which will be used in the assessment of future planning applications, so it is vitally important that, as far as possible, our interests are incorporated within it. We will wait and see but it will be a very slow process.

Town Centre Improvements:

DDC has announced that it has secured £3.2m Future High Streets Funding that will be used to "comprehensively redevelop part of Bench Street. Providing a key thoroughfare between the waterfront and town centre, a new creative space will form part of a mixed-use development that will also include seven residential units." And "reimagining of the subway under the A20 on Townwall Street will encourage greater movement of people between the town

centre, waterfront and cruise terminals.” What this actually means in detail is not clear so we have written to ask for more details and an assurance that this will at last address the former Crypt site that has been a derelict eyesore for decades and a disgrace to the town. In reply we have been given nothing additional to the press release, no assurances about the Crypt and no indication of time scales. This scheme is in addition to the £2.95m Coastal Community Fund project to revamp Dover’s Market Square, mentioned in the last newsletter. There has been no public consultation about it, so we have written to DDC expressing concerns and with some alternative proposals. The funding for schemes in Dover is undoubtedly good news but without any details of how the money will be spent, it is impossible to say whether it will actually deliver the improvements we all look forward to.

Ashen Tree Lane: What is now Ashen Tree Lane lies to the east of the River Dour at the foot of chalk downland hills beneath Dover Castle in an area of land that remained undeveloped until the nineteenth century. In the mid fifteenth century a market was held regularly on the hills which was known as the “Upmarket” and it is quite likely that local traders would have brought their wares to supply the castle garrison. The area later became known as Tinker’s Corner. In the mid nineteenth century a few cottages were built in the lane that were extended and modified until being replaced with the creation of a dairy. What is now Ashen Tree Lane runs off Maison Dieu Road and Castle Hill Road and lies within the boundary of the Dover Castle Conservation Area. There have recently been several planning applications for properties in this lane and there has been some concern that the character of the area would be adversely affected so we have been keen to comment on them to ensure that any development is

carried out sensitively. Two such relate to Ashen Tree House which at one time was used by KCC as a non-residential day centre, but it was then boarded up and left neglected. The new plans are to bring the house back to its original residential use and carry out conservation works together with an extension using matching materials.

To the rear of Ashen Tree House lies a piece of land where proposals have been submitted to build several new dwellings. An application was made in August 2019 for six dwellings and there was much concern from local residents, particularly regarding traffic movements and we too could not support the scheme as there were simply not enough details provided to ensure that the development would be in keeping with the area. This application was withdrawn. A year later a new plan was submitted which was a considerable improvement being of reduced scale and of a design that corresponded well with the surrounding buildings, so we were pleased to offer our support. Subsequently the plans have been amended again to add an additional building and reduce the size of the others, leading to an overcrowded development, so we have objected to this change. So, a lot has been going on in this quiet lane and we wait with interest to see how things turn out.

Former Westmount Education Centre: Many Dover residents will remember the Westmount Education Centre in Folkestone Road which ran courses for adults including short evening classes. Since the centre closed there have been numerous planning applications to develop the site, the first of which was to convert the Westmount building into 23 flats and build 21 houses in the grounds. Although approved the scheme was never delivered. Subsequently a scheme was approved for 97 dwellings, but this too was never delivered. Sadly, through neglect and vandalism the Westmount

building become unusable and in 2015 approval was granted for its demolition. The land has remained unused ever since. This is a particular case that illustrates the problem of the nation's slow house building programme. It is not that Local Authorities hold up the planning process, but rather that developers fail to deliver the schemes that are approved. In a recent national newspaper article, it is reported that there are over one million brownfield sites which have been granted planning permission, but the developers have not yet built on them. The proposed changes to planning legislation seek to accelerate the house building programme by relaxing planning controls but they will not address the problem outlined here. We will end up with the worst of both worlds! More recently, a planning application has been made to install an array of solar panels on the Westmount site. Whilst the generation of green energy is to be welcomed, we have expressed concerns that this scheme might

frustrate the development of the site for housing. We wait and see.

Marina Curve: Sufficient people including the Dover Society wrote to object to the plan to use shipping containers to build a hotel and retail facilities on the new Marina Curve, that the planning application went to the full DDC Planning Committee. Unusually, the heads of tourism and Inward Investment wrote in support of the scheme so we wrote back to them setting out our support in principle for the beneficial impact that this would have for the town but objecting to this particular scheme. Whilst not actually refusing planning permission, DDC has deferred the decision and we understand that it is now no longer likely to go forward.

It appears that winter might actually be coming to an end at last and things are slowly getting back to normal. I wish you all well and an enjoyable Summertime.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS **Sheila Cope**

As I write, we number 480 and so members are to be congratulated for maintaining their subscriptions at a time when two virtual AGMs have taken place and there have therefore been no opportunities to hand over subs. in person. Many members have set up new Standing Orders or paid by Direct Debit, but old fashioned cash and cheques are equally welcome.

About 40 members have now opted to receive a Newsletter by email thus saving postage in many cases. However, if you change your mind, please inform Jeremy on jeremyclope@willersley.plus.com. The

same applies if you wish to stop or start receiving our intermittent email messages.

The hand-delivery of Newsletters continues, and we do appreciate the help of those who undertake this vital task. Especially we thank Anne Mole who has delivered in the Priory/Tower Hamlets area since the early days and has now handed over to Frances Sykes.

We have recently welcomed to membership: Mrs A Mole, Ms J Pearson, Mr H Mayhew, Mrs G Barlow, Mr C & Mrs S Borley, Mr G & Mrs E Toland, Ms E Sanchez-Magner and Mr R Arthur.