

Planning Committee

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Chairman Planning Committee

At last, with the easing of Covid19 restrictions, the committee has started meeting again physically and this has greatly helped the quality of discussion as we consider planning applications and other related matters. I am most grateful to the committee members for all their help and support.

Since the last newsletter we have reviewed some 113 applications that are potentially of interest and made formal response to Dover District Council in respect of fifty-seven of them. The Planning Committee is always pleased to receive comments and feedback from the members of the Society. Members 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: This ongoing saga is very much a good news bad news story. The original plan was for a facility with capacity for 1200 lorries at the site in Whitfield adjacent to B&Q and the new Leisure Centre, but as a result of fierce objections from local residents and from The Dover Society, we now understand that the facility will be reduced to a capacity of just 96 lorries with the remainder being processed at the existing site at Sevington off the M20 near Ashford. Although some concerns remain, this is clearly good news. The bad news is that

the facility may become permanent. The provisions of the Special Development Order specify that the facility will cease operations by 31st December 2025 and that the land will be reinstated to its original condition by 31st December 2026, but with work to create the facility running well behind schedule, it is quite possible that the Special Development Order will be amended to extend its life. There is still a faint possibility that in the light of our post-Brexit experience the facility may not actually be needed or may be very short lived, but I am not very hopeful.

Town Centre Improvements: Many of you will have been interested to see the archaeological excavations in the Market Square being carried out ahead of the redevelopment project starting very soon. Part of the foundations of the Medieval Guild Hall dating from 1605 were exposed and recorded by Canterbury Archaeological Trust. The site has since been backfilled so if you did not see it, I am afraid you are too late! The redevelopment scheme is funded largely from a Coastal Community Fund grant and work is due to start "in the Autumn." We wrote to DDC in response to the original plans as available in January 2021 but did not get a reply until September 2021, but it appears that some of our comments and concerns were still taken into account as there have been some changes to the scheme. We have since expressed concern about the lack of public consultation, but it appears that it fell victim to Covid19 restrictions and on-line meetings with the result that we missed the opportunity to engage more fully although we expected

our letter to have been noted six months earlier than it was! The work will be carried out under Permitted Development Rights so there will be no planning application and therefore no further opportunity to influence the design. Details of the scheme can be seen at <https://www.dover.gov.uk/Planning/Regeneration/Market-Square/Reinventing-Dovers-Market-Square-Dover.aspx>

Adrian Street: A planning application for the redevelopment of the former Karma Leisure site in Adrian Street has been approved at a meeting of the full DDC planning committee. There were over one hundred responses from the public, objecting to the proposal which is to build two buildings incorporating twenty-nine flats. The Dover Society also wrote to object to the scheme and Dover Town Council also objected. Although the provision of much needed housing of reasonable quality is to be welcomed, the proposed buildings are simply too large and have no respect for the local heritage or the dominating effect on the skyline. Not only are we dismayed by the granting of planning approval, but we are also concerned that the views of the Heritage Officer, which were not supportive of the scheme, were not made public until the meeting agenda papers were published leaving it too late for other members of the public to read them and take them into account if they would even be aware of where to look. We wrote to the planning officer about this expressing our concerns even though it is all too late. I fear that Dover will be saddled with a reincarnation of Burlington House being a blot on the landscape for generations to come.

Conversion of commercial premises: With the sad but inevitable decline in the retail sector and the closure of town centre shops it is gratifying to see a number of

planning applications coming forward to convert them into residential accommodation rather than let them remain empty and fall into disrepair becoming an eyesore. In some cases, this is to return the property to its original purpose. One such conversion being considered at present is 67-69 High Street, including the former Good Luck Chinese takeaway. The plan is to remove the extended shop front and convert the two properties into three apartments each along with extensive repair and renovation works. Although the properties are not Listed or in a Conservation Area, they are immediately adjacent to the Grade II Listed Highland Cottage built circa 1700 so we are pleased to see that the works will be sympathetic to the character of the area. We have therefore supported the application which bring a much need improvement to the appearance of this part of the town.

When we consider applications for conversions to residential accommodation, we not only take into account the external appearance of the property but also the amenity value for the would be residents. One particular interest is to ensure that flats are of adequate size. There are national standards that cover this and DDC has its own policy but sadly we have seen these policies violated on occasion, granting permission for rooms that are simply too small and not just marginally so. Nevertheless, we are pleased to support such conversions whenever they are of adequate quality.

As I write this, we are enjoying a late summer and possibly a record breaking September so it is time to start sweeping up leaves and get the secateurs out, or shall I just read some more planning applications!