

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Dover Society AGM 2022

Derek Leach

Once again, my annual report to be presented formally at the 25 April AGM is included in the March Newsletter, which means that I can only cover up to the end of January 2022 to meet the Editor's deadline. Anything new of import February to Easter will be given verbally at the AGM.

As always, your Executive, sub committees and volunteers 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. Once again, we have had to labour within the constraints imposed by the pandemic relying heavily upon the benefits of the internet. Whilst it was another year without any Society trips or holiday, we were able to resume cautiously face to face committee meetings in the autumn and our programme of public meetings in October, but, unfortunately, no Christmas Feast. At the October meeting we took the first live opportunity to elect Patrick Sherratt a life Vice President of the Society for his outstanding contribution to the Society, particularly his 10 years as Chairman of the Planning Committee.

Throughout the year our Secretary, Jeremy Cope, struggled to gain the approval of the Charity Commissioners for amendments to our constitution, necessitating two general meetings for the formal approval of members. We are grateful to him and to Peter Sherrad for

his advice. With several key members of the executive well into their eighties we were concerned about succession planning. This led to a useful thought-provoking discussion in the executive about how to secure the future of the Society, building upon our 483 membership and (dare I say) the reputation we have in the community. Watch this space.

The Newsletter reports from Graham Margery, our Planning Committee Chairman, have given you some indication of its hard work with about three hundred new applications reviewed and commented upon, if appropriate. We continued to make the transport minister aware of our serious concerns about the impact locally of the government's proposed post Brexit Inland Border Facility at Whitfield and were pleased to see the lorry capacity reduced from 1200 to 96 with the site size reduced – even better, no construction as yet. We were pleased to see the Marina Curve Pier open to the public with its quality finish, including the sensitive installation of restored artefacts from the former Prince of Wales Pier; whilst hoping for quality buildings, however, we were disappointed with the planning applications, which were subsequently approved by DDC. The Market Square redevelopment got underway; using Permitted Development Rights the authorities needed no planning application, but we raised several practical and safety objections to the scheme. We considered an application for

two blocks of flats on the former night club site in Adrian Street to be far too high for the site, creating a blot on the landscape; despite one hundred objections it was approved; similarly, whilst welcoming in principle a five storey application in Bench Street, we feel that it is too high. DDC has obtained yet another large grant to improve Bench Street and the Townwall Street underpass, which is very welcome, but details are scarce – it would be great if the derelict Crypt site was tackled at long last! Our policy is still to support the conversion of empty commercial premises, particularly the upper floors, to residential use provided quality and size are adequate. A monumental task, coordinated by Patrick Sherratt, was the Society's lengthy, detailed response to DDC's draft Local Plan covering development up to 2035. A surprise was an invite by Highways England regarding the dualling of the A2 from Lydden to the Eastern Docks, but no information was forthcoming; it remains a dream!

Our Refurbishment Committee/Team, chaired by Jenny Olpin, has a very wide remit to monitor and lobby for improvements regarding the quality of life of the community and of the appearance of the town, both for locals and visitors. During the year, this included urging the local authorities not to impose changes without public consultation – such as the 'parklet' seating that suddenly appeared. We supported the successful Co-Innovation Centre for small start-up businesses to seek a new location when it had to leave its Stembrook premises. The opening of the The Pantry food store and the Sunrise Café for the less fortunate (and the more fortunate in the cafe) was welcomed as was the accommodation for the homeless during the pandemic winters. The

proposed cycle hire scheme, funded by KCC and based at 5 sites initially, was welcomed and we are supporting the campaign to save the Roundhouse Theatre (and to improve it). Deborah Gasking and her team, The Wombles, continued to be proactive, attempting to provide a green corridor from Station Approach to the town centre and undertaking regular litter pickings on Shakespeare Beach. Volunteers continue to work in and on the River Dour to make it more attractive and accessible to the public with an education project and, to counter illegal fish poaching, flyfishing courses (where caught fish are returned to the river). Occasional meetings with the local police commander continue, enabling us to raise concerns.

Turning to projects – 'projects' implies schemes with a limited timescale, but some of our projects have become permanent features of the Society! Our gallant band of volunteers are still maintaining Cowgate Cemetery despite the constraints of covid. The Town Hall refurbishment project, triggered by the Society in 2010, is now well underway. With the building closed for normal use until 2024 it is now watertight, virtually emptied of contents ready for the main contractor to start work internally in late spring; the associated varied programme of activities to engage the public is already making an impact both locally and nationally. Hopefully, our plan to install one new Society blue plaque a year, which has faltered due to Covid, will resume in 2022 commemorating historic Castle Hill House and its illustrious three generations of Knocker town clerks who lived there; Anne Pratt, a well-known Victorian botanist who lived in Castle Street, should be next. Finally, a new Society project just underway is to research and submit an application for

Dover to have city status. It will be a daunting task with no guarantee of success, but, if not, it will be a worthwhile exercise that you may wish to be involved with.

Our Newsletter 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. Terry Sutton's press reports help to keep the Society in the public eye. Behind the scenes Mike Weston continued to cook the financial books; thanks also to Yvonne Miller, who has the thankless task of taking the Executive minutes and to every other member of the Executive, subcommittees, and groups for their contributions. Lynda Smith kindly agreed to manage our indoor meetings during the year.

Three members of the Executive are retiring from their officer roles after very many years of dedicated service to the Society: Mike Weston as Treasurer, Jeremy Cope as Secretary (having previously been Chairman, Vice Chairman, and founder member of the Executive in 1988) and Sheila Cope, Membership Secretary. I am sure that they will continue to serve the Society in other ways. In addition, I am standing down as Chairman after 18 years; it has been a great honour and privilege. Fortunately, I am confident that we shall be able to recommend replacements for your approval at the AGM.

On first being elected Chairman in 2004 I said that my aim was to increase the membership from about 450 to at least five hundred. We still have not reached that elusive number; perhaps my successor will have more success.

AGM

A reminder to all members

The Annual General Meeting this year will be held live at 7.30pm on Monday 25th April at St Mary's Parish Centre

Resolutions for discussion and nominations for officers and committee members should be submitted in writing to;

Hon Secretary: Jeremy Cope
53 Park Avenue, Dover. CT16 1HD
Tel: 01304 211348
E-mail: jeremycopes@willersley.plus.com

All resolutions and nominations must be received by
Wednesday 6th April 2022

Nominations should be supported by a proposer and seconder and the written consent of the potential candidate.

As this is the first live AGM since 2019 and the most important meeting of the year, all members are urged to attend if possible.