

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Dover Society 2022/23

Jenny Olpin

The Dover Society has seen a significant period of change in its officers and membership of its Executive, Planning and Environment (Refurbishment) teams during the past year. Whether it was the impact of Covid, or purely the pace of time, a few of our key officers sought the opportunity to 'step down' from their roles after many decades of service to The Society. Their advice, expertise and wisdom, however, remains as their support continues and I, for one, would not be able to hold the role of its chairman without being able to 'knock' at their door seeking their much-valued guidance, and for that I am extremely grateful. Those past officers you will recognise as Derek Leach (past Chairman and currently Vice-Chairman), Capt. Mike Weston (Hon. Treasurer), Jeremy Cope (Hon. Secretary) and Sheila Cope (Membership Secretary). The Society is indebted to you all.

With those changes will, of course, come new thinking, perspectives and priorities whilst committed to ensuring that The Society's objectives remain core and fundamental in all its activities and functions. We currently have a strong focus on our website development and social media platforms. The website is being redesigned and both our Facebook (Meta) and Instagram pages are being reviewed. We are looking to make the website an information 'go to' alongside other Dover sites with easy to navigate 'links', to a wealth of interesting and informative pages that include a membership application.

As we emerged from our 'lockdown' slumbers and returned to the more socially accepted face to face meetings, we were pleased to discuss a proposal from our member Peter

Sherrad to support, in principle, an application to apply for Dover to be granted City status. Subsequently, Derek Leach and I attended a Dover Town Council meeting to present our rationale for supporting the bid and we were heartened by the council's enthusiasm for the initiative. We were very pleased to confirm The Society's support to Peter with this venture, but as he is quick to add, it will only progress if given support by our members whom it is hoped will contact him with a paragraph detailing what we consider is 'the best' about Dover. (I urge you to do this if you have not already done so sherred@invictaawiz.co.uk)

Much of our executive and team's energy has been to comment on the draft Dover District Council Local Plan. This document guides decisions on future development proposals and opportunities for the Dover District, that include housing, employment, and the environment. This new Plan will influence thinking up to 2040 and has recently concluded its consultation stage. The Society contributed significantly to the consultation and I urge you look at the Draft Local Plan document on the Dover District Council website <http://www.dover.gov.uk>

I am committed to working in partnership with Dover District and Dover Town Councils and Kent Police, for the greater good of Dover and its surrounding Parishes. To this end, Derek Leach, Graham Margery and myself have regular meetings with these agencies, not hesitating to raise issues and to have 'difficult' conversations, but with diplomacy and understanding. We very much enjoy these meetings and are sincerely grateful to

these agencies for their encouragement and support of The Society.

Having led on the Town Hall guided tours we maintain a strong interest in its refurbishment. It is indeed an exciting project which will hopefully result in an increase in the tourist footprint in Dover. Derek regularly feeds back on the progress of its transformation into a tourist hub and many of our members eagerly support by volunteering for a range of activities. The Maison Dieu is by default the Town of Dover's Village Hall!

The Society does, of course, lead on local Projects. Currently these are -

Cowgate Cemetery - The Society has a small but dedicated group of volunteers who maintain the cemetery keeping it a pleasant, respectful and peaceful environment for visitors and wild-life, and, on occasions, those seeking a place to shelter. As with most groups there comes a time when age intervenes to prevent those volunteers doing the job to the best of their ability. Therefore, I must take this opportunity to appeal to our membership (and beyond if you know of any willing souls) who would love to support this work in such a unique area of the town. (It's cheaper than the Gym!!)

Blue Plaques - This has been an interesting time for planning and discussing our blue plaques. On 11th September we were pleased to unveil our most recent installation on Castle Hill House, a Grade II listed building. The plaque commemorated the home of the Knocker family and that of Lord Astor of Hever. At the executive we have many heated (or should I say 'warm') debates as to whom and where our plaques should commemorate and be installed. I am pleased that our next two plaques will include that of a woman, Lorna Bomford, 1883 – 1962, who was the first female councillor in Dover, 1919 – 1921, a Suffragist, a Justice of the Peace from 1927 to 1945 and was an accomplished artist exhibiting in the Paris Salon. We are

looking to forward to installing this during the spring at Milestone House, Temple Ewell where she lived for many years. Following this our next plaque will commemorate Admiral of the Fleet, The Lord Lewin, who went on to be Chief of Defence Staff during the Falklands War. He was born in Dover in 1920 and we look forward to confirming the siting of this plaque.

Our Planning Team continues to closely monitor all planning applications placed before Dover District Council. This is a dedicated task that requires focus and appreciation of the detail. During this year the team has established a communication pathway with the planning team at DDC who are respectful and welcoming of our planning comments. Our team is now located at The Beacon Church for their meetings and have re-structured with Ann Burke and Graham Margery as Co-Chairs.

The Refurbishment Committee has evolved to be the Environment Team. They too have a new lead, Janet Dagsys, is supported by an energetic group who focus on the quality, aesthetics, safety, events, and general environmental issues that impact on the lives of all our Dover communities. This can be an overwhelming remit, but the various talents of its members ensures that the meetings are constructive. This is the team that will 'lobby' the Dover Town Council, Dover District Council and Kent County Council on issues such as litter, drainage, lighting, 'eyesores' and Rights of Way to speak of only a few.

It is, of course, also important to remember that The Society's 'areas of benefit' are not just Dover Town but that of Guston, Hougham, Langdon (East and West, Martin and Martin Mill), Lydden, Temple Ewell, River, St Margaret's and Whitfield and, I am keen that we are not just focussed on Dover Town so please do let us know if there is anything, as members, that The Society can, within its remit, offer support.

Socially we were sorry to have to cancel the trips planned for Summer 2022. Following a brief survey, we are now focussing on day trips, including London, as possible venues for 2023. We are grateful to our member Rodney Stone who is liaising with organisers, and we look forward to offering some interesting destinations and hope to see as many of you as possible joining with other members, friends and family.

We were pleased to have a very successful Christmas Feast at the Dover Marina Hotel last December. Eighty-three members and friends enjoyed an excellent lunch followed by delightful entertainment from Mr Peter Whibley, and his accompanist, Ms Aileen Dickson. The Raffle raised £267.50 for the Dover Foodbank. Our winter monthly meetings continue to be popular and our speakers interesting and engaging.

The annual February Wine & Wisdom, organised by Quiz Master Clive Taylor, is now, following 'lockdown' run on an American Supper style at £5 each. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Lyn Smith and her team for her work as our new Social Secretary.

This Report does not cover every detail of our activities as there are Civic roles and responsibilities that we as members of the Planning and Executive engage with on behalf of The Dover Society. I hope you are

inspired not only to continue your support but also to consider joining either the teams or as a volunteer with our projects. I also implore you to be more interactive. Let us hear from you, we welcome feedback! We want you to have a voice in shaping The Society as it moves on through the 21st Century and is truly representative of the Dover that is inclusive of all its communities albeit cultural or economic. We are a Society that is proud of its heritage, the potential of Dover and believes in working in partnership for the future of the town, and its' surrounding area, that at last is shaking off its 'post-war' shackles. We look forward to the coming year in continuing to monitor, challenge, partner and inspire those who care and work for the promotion of our town. Let's embrace our heritage, our history and our communities with the shared objectives that aim to preserve, develop and improve for the good of all Dover's society.

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