

Planning Committee

Graham Margery - Co Chairman

There have been a few changes to the Planning Committee recently and we are pleased to welcome Ann Burke as Co-Chair and Jacquie Axford to help in the ongoing task of overseeing planning applications. Over the last four months we have reviewed some 75 applications that are potentially of interest and made formal response to Dover District Council in respect of 21 of them.

Local Plan: Section 3 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that each local planning authority should prepare a Local Plan for its area. The Local Plan guides decisions on future development proposals and addresses the needs and opportunities of the area. Topics that Local Plans usually cover include housing, employment and shops and they also identify where development should take place and areas where development should be restricted. It is therefore a crucially important document that is used to assess Local Authority plans in a number of aspects including the assessment of planning applications. The current DDC Local Plan was adopted in 2010 and the new one has been under consideration for some time having been delayed by the pandemic. The first public consultation was concluded in March 2021 and, of course we made comments on the plan, to try and ensure our interests were taken into account. The second public consultation on a revised plan was concluded in December 2022 and again we made our comments. We now have to wait the results of the consultation to be considered and a final draft produced that will be presented to the Planning Inspectorate towards the end of 2023 with a view to adoption in 2024. We look forward to

the new Local Plan and hope to see our interests reflected in it. We will refer to it as plans are brought forward and will endeavour to hold the Local Authority to account.

Bench Street: Dover District Council announced in April 2021 that £3.2m had been secured from the government Future High Streets Fund which together with £1.7m from DDC will be used to redevelop part of Bench Street. More recently DDC has submitted a Levelling up Fund bid which, if successful, will be used to further develop Bench Street and make improvements to the subway to the sea front.

At the heart of the latest plans is a £2.9m project to comprehensively redevelop part of Bench Street providing a key thoroughfare between the waterfront and town centre. There will also be a new so called creative space forming part of a mixed-use development that will include seven residential units. The area involves the large building once displaying the Banksy artwork and the east elevation of Bench Street including the Funkey Monkey night club. The draft proposal was shown to the public at an engagement event last summer which we were happy to support in principle but with some reservations about the details. The “Banksy” building and the east of Bench Street will be demolished and replaced with an educational campus for the creative and digital industries and facilities for small/medium businesses. There will also be a green space to the rear of Bench Street.

We have long recognized that the Bench Street area is in desperate need of

regeneration with progressive dereliction over the last 40 years. We also recognize that this proposal represents a small part of a bigger scheme for the Bench Street area with the underpass and the western side of Bench Street also needing redevelopment. As there are no published plans yet for funding the work on these additional areas, we fear that they will be delayed, be sub-standard, or may not happen at all.

We are concerned about the unspecified details of the current scheme which presumably will come later. We are particularly disappointed that the Banksy building is planned to be demolished as it is deemed to be structurally unsound. This building has interesting architectural features so we hope to see them reflected in the new design particularly the decorative window surrounds and the rounded corner marking the original junction of Snargate Street with Bench Street which, if mirrored in the new college building, would open up the view into the town and create an attractive “funnel” drawing people from the seafront into the town centre. The buildings on the east of Bench Street also have interesting features which we would hope to see reinstated. DDC have now acquired the properties involved and the intention is to demolish them while detailed plans are worked up. We wait with interest to see how this develops.

The Three Cups, Crabble Hill: We hear a lot from the media that pubs are finding these to be difficult times particularly after stresses of the pandemic. We now see that a planning application has been submitted to convert the Three Cups pub into four flats. Whilst it is sad to see the demise of another pub, the provision of much needed additional housing is something to be welcomed although there are some concerns about parking. The flats are each of a good size meeting design standards

which is always something of interest to us. The application has yet to be determined so we wait to see how things turn out.

The Citadel, Western Heights: We commented in the last newsletter that there are plans to convert some of the buildings for commercial use. Subsequently there has been another planning application. This is all a good sign that an otherwise derelict site is being slowly brought into use and this will involve improving access to the site. Being part of the Western Heights Conservation Area and with some Listed Buildings the changes will need to be handled sensitively but the longer-term plans will open up the site and ensure environmental sustainability.

Barwick Road: A Planning Application has recently been submitted for a development of 73 terraced houses and 5 blocks comprising 64 flats. The blocks of flats are of three and four storeys designed to blend with the landscape which is on a steep hill. The land in question is currently a disused light industrial site now derelict so bringing this into use for housing is very much to be welcomed. Much of the proposed site will be of modular construction which ensures rapid build together with longer term energy efficiency. The properties are all to a high standard in a setting comprising green spaces with trees. Unusually, the landowner will retain ownership of the site, the dwellings all being for rental and in this way solving the perennial problem of providing affordable housing whilst giving a return to the developer. The increased traffic in Coombe Valley Road is of course a concern but overall, this is a well thought out and sensitive scheme which we have been pleased to support.

A belated Happy New Year to you all as we look forward to the joys of Springtime.