

Planning Committee

Graham Margery - Co Chairman

Statistically, this has been a relatively quiet period since the last newsletter, with fewer planning applications for us to review, but the number we have felt needed comment has been normal. In total we have reviewed some 63 applications that are potentially of interest and made formal response to Dover District Council in respect of 22 of them.

The Three Cups, Crabble Hill: We mentioned in the last newsletter the planning application to convert the former Three Cups public house into four self-contained flats. Whilst regretting the loss of the pub we supported the application as the accommodation was of a reasonable size and quality. We now know that planning approval has been granted. In addition, another application has been approved for a dwelling in Dodds Lane at the end of the existing terrace and utilising part of the pub garden. The height and width are in keeping with the existing terraced properties and amounts to a restoration of a building destroyed in the war. We also supported this application.

Bench Street: We mentioned in the last newsletter Dover District Council's plans to redevelop the Bench Street area. Things are now progressing and the details of the scheme are becoming clear. DDC have now purchased numbers 8,10,11,14 & 15 and already own the car park.

Number 11 is the former Castle Amusements building, once sporting a Banksy artwork. This has fallen into dilapidation and has been assessed to be in an unsafe condition, such that demolition is the only viable possibility. Similarly, numbers 14 & 15 are the former Funkey Monkey bar, and this too is considered to be

in such a poor state that demolition is necessary. At our regular meetings with DDC executives we have challenged this view as the buildings are architecturally significant and of historic interest, but we understand they will be demolished anyway. This despite the recommendation by Historic England that Dover should "Invest in historic buildings: Do not demolish them! They are an irreplaceable and necessary asset that should be re-used." (Historic Places Panel Review Paper Dover July 2021).

DDC have since submitted a planning application for their demolition and gave it approval without advertising it, making the decision in the minimum legally permitted time scale such that there was no opportunity for public comment. We have challenged this approach also and have been advised that, under the circumstances, there is no legal requirement to advertise the application. Nevertheless, we consider this lack of transparency to be underhanded and is somewhat reminiscent of the infamous demolition of Brook House in the early hours one Saturday morning in 1988. If new buildings have to be the answer, we have asked that they should reflect in some way the features of the old and not be 1960's style rectangular boxes.



Bench Street Dover

And what of the Banksy artwork? We are told that it has been accurately scanned using sophisticated digital technology so that it can be recreated at some suitable site at some time in the future.

Creative Centre: Earlier in the year a public engagement event was held together with discussions with stakeholders to consider proposals for the new Creative Centre planned to be built at the junction of Bench Street and Fishmonger Lane using part of the existing car park. This is an integral part of the larger Bench Street redevelopment project. Amongst other things, the centre will provide for exhibitions, functions, gallery, meetings, and presentations as well as studio/making spaces and a café. Architecturally, the building is being presented as a modern cube-like structure which, although arguably suitable for a Creative Centre, is quite unlike anything else nearby and lacks any features which reflect the heritage of this part of the town. We have expressed our concerns about this. As far as we are aware, nothing definite has been decided yet and we continue to engage with DDC to influence the decision-making process before it is too late to change anything.

In addition, DDC have commissioned a local firm of architects to produce a Cultural Strategy for Dover and there have been a number of consultation events that we have participated in. It seems rather odd to be formulating a strategy when important decisions have already been made.

Roman Painted House: Discovered in 1970 by the Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit under Dr Brian Philp, the Dover Roman Painted House is one of the finest Roman town houses in Britain with magnificent wall paintings and is of international significance. Although the site is owned by Dover District Council, it is

managed and made open to the public by a board of trustees. Sadly, in recent years, the full potential of this important site as a tourist attraction and educational experience has not been realised, with access to the site being somewhat haphazard at times. This is in part due to the restrictions imposed during the Covid pandemic and also due to the difficulties the trustees now face in fulfilling their role. A number of the trustees are unable properly to fulfil their obligations due to ill health or other reasons, with the result that the archaeology is not being properly managed, and visitors are denied the opportunity to view such an important site in the way that it could and should be seen. Worst of all, we understand that the wall paintings themselves may be deteriorating and are in need of professional conservation work to ensure they are well preserved into the future. We have raised these concerns with DDC and have also written to the then Leader of the Council urgently to engage with the trustees in discussion about overcoming these problems. There is a long-held vision for this site in which the archaeology is preserved and displayed in a modern, high-quality manner, the building modernized, and access to the site made from the Market Square across the Roman Lawn, with the archaeology buried under the Roman Lawn also being re-excavated and put on display, enhancing the visitor attraction. We urge the parties involved to bring this vision to realisation so that this important site can become the major tourist attraction that it deserves to be, for the wider benefit of the town.

Malvern Road: Some of you may have seen in the local press recently that a planning application for a block of flats in Malvern Road has been turned down. We applaud this decision as it is something we strongly objected to. The original application was for 45 self-contained flats in a block with up to

seven storeys reducing to four further up the hill. The structure would be completely out of character with the existing houses and would totally dominate the street scene. This first application was refused, but a second application was made for 52 self-contained flats also in a block of seven storeys, but reducing going up the hill. This too was refused because "The proposal, by reason of the scale, form and design would appear as a dominant and incongruous form of development that would not be visually attractive, would cause visual harm and would fail to add to the overall quality of the area." Dover does not need this kind of development.

North Military Road: Dover District Council has submitted a planning application for a three-storey building comprising eight self-contained flats on what is currently the car park at the bottom

of North Military Road. Although not in a Conservation Area, the site is adjacent to three others namely, Town Centre, Dover College and Western Heights, so its setting has a potential to impact upon them. It will also be clearly visible from the Priory Street roundabout. The plan is well thought out, using the difficult topology to best advantage and preserving the tall, mature trees to afford screening. The building and flats are of high quality and include energy efficiency measures and also solar panels wherever possible. The provision of quality affordable housing like this is something we have been pleased to support despite its sensitive setting.

As I write this, we have blue skies and sunshine but with a cold north easterly wind. O the joys of an English summer! I think I'll look at some more planning applications.

The Electric Motel Company of Brighton Their Architect - His View

Terry Sutton

A major project to construct a 90-room hotel on Dover's waterfront is set to start next year (2024), says the providing company.

An architect representing the company, The Electric Motel Company of Brighton, says the hotel on the Marine Curve is part of Dover Harbour Board's massive £250 million regeneration of the western docks.

The architect was attending a Dover Harbour Board public meeting when he had a chat with Terry Sutton, representing The Dover Society. He made no bones about his contempt for The Dover Society,

denying it had 500 members. Anyway (he said), it had no official consultation representation. He argued there were only five objectors to the original shipping container scheme and they, were all members of The Dover Society.

In the early stages of planning, in 2020, the Electric Motel Company suggested the construction would utilise old shipping containers, but that idea is now dropped, and construction will use conventional materials. The proposal from the hotel company is also to provide a swimming pool, restaurant, bar and workspace, all of which have received planning consent from Dover District Council.