

Planning Committee

Graham Margery - Co Chairman

Over the whole of 2023 the Dover Society Planning Committee reviewed some 200 planning applications that are potentially of interest and made formal response to the Local Authority in respect of seventy-three of them. Over the last couple of months, however, this has been a particularly quiet period, to the extent that the Town Council cancelled their planning committee meeting three times for lack of business. In total, since the last newsletter, we have reviewed some sixty-five applications and made response in respect of twenty-one of them. As ever we would encourage members to look at planning applications that may be of interest to them and make comment to Dover District Council as they feel appropriate or contact our Planning Committee with their views. Applications can be found on the DDC website or the Dover Society Website under Planning.

Pencester Road Bus Contraflow: It's not often that we receive comments or questions on an issue from the wider Society membership or the general public, but the proposal to create a bus contraflow in Pencester Road, with associated alterations to junctions and the removal of on-street parking, has sparked interest like never before. In November, KCC announced and launched a public consultation in connection with the new Dover Fastrack bus service that is due to be operational in Spring 2024. Although DDC supported the scheme, the Dover Society objected to it, having received numerous adverse comments and nothing favourable.

The reason behind the scheme as given is that the return route of the Fastrack from Dover Priory Station, through the town and

back to Whitfield, is problematical in adverse traffic conditions. A return via York Street and Townwall Street could be impeded by traffic queuing for the Eastern Docks and the existing route via Priory Road and Ladywell is undesirable for reasons that are not at all clear. Hence the proposal to return via a contraflow in Pencester Road.

We were astounded that the return route was not properly thought out earlier when the Fastrack was first proposed. We agree that a return route via the A20 is not viable but, overall, we consider the proposed scheme to be unnecessary since the return via Priory Street and Ladywell already exists and brings passengers to a stop in Maison Dieu Road at the end of Pencester Road.

Specific problems are,

- Loss of parking in Worthington Street and Pencester Road and the potential impact on local businesses.
- Increased traffic pressures in Queen's Gardens resulting from the above loss of parking.
- Serious problems for St Paul's Church which will now be in the middle of a traffic light-controlled junction. This will make it impossible to safely drop off disabled worshippers and cause similar problems for a funeral hearse and for weddings.
- Similar problem of dropping at the doctor's surgery in Pencester Road.
- The proximity of the new Maison Dieu/Pencester traffic light to the

existing pedestrian-controlled crossing in Maison Dieu Road will be confusing and dangerous.

- The restriction in width of pavements in places is contrary to the desire to encourage pedestrians.
- Not clear that the redesigned junctions will enable heavy goods vehicles to turn without mounting the pavement and demolishing railings.
- The existing bus route along Priory Street and Ladywell brings passengers to the heart of the town either by the Maison Dieu or opposite the old Magistrates Court building which is close to where the buses would be stopping in Pencester Road under the proposed scheme.

The consultation closed in December, so we now have to wait for the results and the outcome.

Update on Planning Applications

Land Adjacent to Stanhope Road:

In August 2019, a planning application was submitted for the construction of thirty-two dwellings on vacant land at the top of Stanhope Road. Subsequently there have been some amendments to the original plans but there remain very strong local objections. These have been based mainly on increased parking pressures on an already congested road and also the impact on the ecology. The most recent amendment is to remove the proposed affordable housing as the Local Plan excludes such a requirement from developments in the Dover Urban Area.

As Dover is a recognised area of high deprivation, to specifically preclude the requirement for affordable housing seems perverse, so we have raised the matter with Dover District Council. We are told that

housing development in Dover is particularly difficult and therefore costly because of the steep hills, often difficult site access, and the likely need for archaeological investigations. With the average house price in Dover being considerably less than elsewhere in the district, the developer cannot recoup these costs with lower priced houses, so the choice seems to be either no affordable housing or no housing at all! The problem is intractable and will only be resolved when the Dover's overall prosperity improves by making it an attractive place to live work and visit.

Whitfield Urban Development:

The residents of Whitfield are understandably concerned by the scale of the Urban Development which has been happening in recent years and the Parish Council has been a strong voice in raising these concerns. There is a general lack of provision for social and community infrastructure and services, rights of way blocked off, amenity green spaces not provided, trees and hedges removed and not replaced, not to mention the failure to comply with planning conditions during the construction work. With the Phase 1 development well advanced and nearing completion, there are now further planning applications being submitted for approval as part of the Phase 2 development totalling some seven-hundred units so far. We have no confidence that the problems associated with Phase 1 will be better handled in Phase 2. The Parish Council is calling for a full public consultation on this next phase and its findings to be taken into account and enforced. We add our support and wish them every success.

Bench Street:

With the demolition of numbers 14 & 15 Bench Street, the former *Funky Monkey* bar,

now complete there has been a fresh public engagement event regarding new proposals for the site.

The new development will provide -

- An education campus providing training opportunities in the fast-growing creative and digital industries, expanding access and the curriculum for local students.
- A business centre, providing flexible, affordable facilities for start-ups and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to attract and retain skilled workers and provide new employment opportunities.
- A creative centre, funded by the Dover District Council and the Government from the Future High Street fund.
- A riverside parklet, creating accessible green space for local people and visitors.
- Expansion of the new Dover Click2Cycle bike hire scheme.

The new proposal represents a considerable improvement on that originally presented earlier in the year. It now appears as a better-quality scheme of some architectural merit rather than a plain rectangular box. It is good to see that consideration has been given to the design of all four sides of the building including multi-faceted features as it will be seen and accessed from every direction. The proposed use of brick rather than concrete or cladding will better fit with the surrounding area and its historic context. We have suggested further improvement by the use of contrasting colours in the window reveals and door frames to match the styles in Cannon Street and Victoria Park. We also suggested, amongst other things, the use of shrubs and hanging plants on the edges of the roof to soften the

flatness of it or perhaps some other hard structural feature.

The results of the consultation will be published early in 2024.

The Citadel:

Originally built as part of the Napoleonic fortifications of the Western Heights, in modern times the Citadel has served as a Young Offender Institution and an Immigration Removal Centre. Since these functions have ceased, the site is now in private ownership. The new owner has already been granted approval to make improvements to some of the casemates to make them useable as commercial units and some of the more modern buildings in the complex have been granted permission for them to be used as secure training facilities for the emergency services. This provides an income that will help maintain the site and fund future developments. We understand that the owner is keen to preserve the ecology of the site as well as respect its historic significance and also make the site more accessible to the public over time. We will learn more of these plans at the March Society meeting where our guest speaker will be David de Min, the site owner.

Roman Painted House:

Sadly, the Roman Painted House has not been open to the public for most of last year. There have been changes to the management arrangements recently, giving Dover District Council more direct control of the site. We have been told that it should be re-opened by the Summer or perhaps the Spring. Furthermore, the vision to modernise the building and improve access across a re-excavated Roman Lawn is not dead. Of course, all this will take time and a lot of money, but we can all be optimistic about Dover's precious jewel.