

LOCAL ISSUES UPDATE

Reported by ADRIAN GALLEY, Chairman of the Planning Sub-Committee

The Town Centre Management Group

Within the last few years Doverians have, justifiably, been concerned about the decline and shabbiness of parts of the town centre. Sadly, in the last year, the successful launch of the White Cliffs Experience, Museum and Cinema has been accompanied, at the other end of the town, by the closure of a number of shops, notably the large stores of the Co-op and Sainsbury's, adding to the feeling of decline.

These closures, coupled with and partly caused by the current recession, make the regeneration of a town centre like Dover's a particularly difficult task. However, as discussed in *Newsletter 12* (Cannon Street Marketing Initiative) Dover has a number of unique advantages over other towns with similar problems.

I have recently had talks with Anthony Pound, recently-appointed Chairman of the Town Centre Management Group. (He also controls the "Lanterns" development in Folkestone). Mr Pound has been given the task of identifying problems and putting forward proposals for various areas of the town, divided for this purpose into four areas: Cherry Tree Avenue to Bridge Street, Bridge Street to the Town Hall, the Town Hall to Bench Street and, finally, Snargate Street.

Here I propose to discuss the Town Hall to Bench Street area, which can perhaps be described as the town's "Golden Triangle" (apologies to Budge Adams!) as it contains three of the town's main tourist attractions — (the Castle being the fourth). Within this triangle, the Old Town Gaol, the Roman Painted House and the White Cliffs Experience create a focus for visitors. This is the town's unique selling point.

For quality retailers to be attracted to an area, that area must have a flow of pedestrians and appear bustling and attractive. A chicken and egg situation, perhaps? The area will only attract the shoppers when the retailers are in place and the retailers will only be attracted when the area is busy with shoppers.

"Not so," says Mr Pound. The key to attracting shoppers to an area (apart from accessibility) lies in the presentation and marketing of the goods sold in the shops. If all existing retailers were to invest in attractive shop-fitting and window displays, the number of shoppers would increase significantly and the greater activity would be a good reason for other retailers to take up premises in the area.

Many retailers have already taken this initiative and changes which support Mr Pound's contention are taking place all the time.

However, some problems are not easily solved and one of the most difficult is that of the "absentee landlord", who is not interested in upgrading the town but only

in the tenant paying the rent on time. Charity shops, although they have a rôle in town centres, fall into this category and take up valuable, prominent retail sites. In another category are banks and building societies, which tend to sterilise an area and, when established, tend to stay, as can be seen in the Market Square.

So, firstly the problems have to be identified, then solutions put forward and, finally, the proposed changes have to be facilitated, co-ordinated and funded. Mr Pound will be putting his report before councillors shortly and thereafter the outcome depends on the people of Dover (as represented by their elected councillors).

Many questions present themselves. How important an issue is this? Can we justify committing resources to a scheme that could (and, some say, should) be funded by the private sector?

Perhaps the only way to answer these questions is to pose another. What will happen if we do nothing?

A.G.M. 1992

About one-quarter of the Society's 320 members attended the AGM on 13th April, 1992.

The three visiting speakers on this successful occasion were Lord Rees, a Vice-President, John Moir, the District Council's Chief Executive and David Shaw, Dover's re-elected Member of Parliament.

The event will be reported in detail in *Newsletter 14*.

CORRECTIONS to the January *Newsletter*, No. 12

Front Cover. Roy Chambers' drawing of the devastated Townwall Street was made in 1953, not 1940.

Page 21 The last sentence of Jack Woolford's review of the Kent Concert Orchestra Concert should have been completed as follows:

".....on this occasion we are particularly grateful to the following for their support: The Dover District Council, Messrs Pfizer Ltd, The National Westminster Bank plc, Adams the Printers, Dover

Page 51 The last line on the page should read:

"around the Abbey. *In 1192 Sir William de Auberville founded the Abbey.* Perhaps the name . . ."

Without the italicised sentence the suggestion that the name was taken by workers on the estate is not credible.

The Producer apologises.