

IMPACT

ACTION IN LOCAL IMPROVEMENT

A CHALLENGING FIRST YEAR

A YEAR AGO, the Dover and Deal programme was just getting under way, and I looked forward in this newsletter to a challenging but rewarding partnership. 1993 has lived up to expectations in both respects. The latest in a series of environmental improvement projects, targeted on Kent's economic priority areas, **IMPACT** in Dover is playing its part in improving the image and "marketability" of the area.

THE CHALLENGE

The County and District Councils have joined forces to create the **IMPACT** project; they have committed substantial resources to create a programme which will make not just visual improvements but also make the towns work better, and help to attract investment. In my view, just asking the question "how would you spend the money?" is wide of the mark; the challenge as we see it is to put together a coherent programme which builds on what has gone before, reflects current needs and aspirations, and is capable of being achieved.

The Dover Society has played a strong rôle from the outset. I found the "workshop" meeting we had with you in March especially stimulating and valuable. It was an important stage in setting up priorities for action, and contributed a whole list of ideas which we have since tested in similar sessions with other groups. What came through particularly strongly was the need to respond to the changes brought about by the A20 works, to strengthen the links between various parts of the town centre, and to improve points of arrival such as the station and car parks.

Similar brainstorming sessions with a forum of Dover organisations (in parallel with a Deal Forum) are helping us to piece together next year's programme. In the meantime the challenge has been to respond quickly to things that were already happening in the two towns, and get projects on the ground.

THINGS ARE HAPPENING

The A20 – No-one will need reminding of the highway works that have been going on. Whether you regard the new A20 as a lifeline or as an obstacle, it certainly presents a challenge. This new "front door" to the town and to Britain is a major focus of the **IMPACT** programme. The local authorities had fought hard to get the road, and to mitigate some of its worst effects; our job has become that of looking for minor modifications to the design which wouldn't further slow down its progress, and for opportunities for improving adjacent sites and buildings.

We soon came to the conclusion that some of the main opportunities – and much of the pressing need – came in the Snargate Street area. **IMPACT** has helped design and

134 fund changes to the treatment of this historic street – granite curbs instead of concrete, different paving and traditional lights – which will help at least to give it its own sense of place. At the same time, our architect is working with the residents and traders associations on a face-lift scheme for the buildings and on a number of individual building/shopfront improvements.

After carrying out a landscape appraisal of the whole urban stretch of the A20, we have started negotiations on a number of individual schemes, all of which would contribute to that all improvement first impression that people get of the town. Amongst these are the improvements at the foot of the Grand Shaft, the leisure centre car park and Army Careers Office.

Bench Street – The re-paving of Bench Street, now nearly complete, was an **IMPACT** scheme, added on to the A20 works and, to avoid further disruption, matching the high quality materials used around the subway. We see this as an important ingredient in a package of measures to strengthen the links, as best one can, between the town centre and seafront. It is likely to be followed by similar attention to the New Bridge area. Bench Street is another area which we have targeted for special attention, working closely with building owners to encourage upgrading. Jay's Wine Bar is an example of this, where we grant-aided an improved shop front scheme designed by our architect to take the place of a more mundane proposal.

London Road – Again, a highway scheme was going to happen anyway. Our contributions have been in the form of a package of additional landscaping and boundary wall, to try to hold on to as much of the street quality as possible. It included the retention of the granite curbs which are such a strong feature of Dover's streetscape (supplemented by new ones), the construction of a new flint wall, the installation of a substantial planter and tree planting.

DEAL – The first major scheme delivered by **IMPACT** was the first phase of the Middle Street Car Park and alleyways, a major upgrading of this important central space. We are now looking at the repaving, in traditional materials, of the area of High Street in front of St. George's Church and the Town Hall.

WHAT NEXT?

Within this year's programme, there's much more to come:

River Dour – Taking the Dover Society's proposals as a starting point, we've carried out our own appraisal of this important corridor, and highlighted four areas for early attention – Mill Lane, Stembrook, South Kent College and Ladywell. Proposals for the first two are now being finalised for discussion.

Dover Seafront – Working with the Dover Harbour Board's architects, we have been concentrating first on the important stretch of the promenade in front of Waterloo Crescent, and hope to include a public art element in this.

Dover Priory Station – British Rail's architects have responded enthusiastically to ideas of upgrading this key area, and are keen to look at a phased approach.

Future Programme – Work on organising future priorities is now the main focus of our discussions with local groups. The Dover Society is a key member of the local forum which involves, amongst others, the Chambers of Commerce, hotel and tourist organisations and residents groups.

MONEY FROM EUROPE!

One of the best pieces of news this year was that our bid for EC "Transfrontier" funding had been improved "in principle". Much of our programme this year therefore becomes eligible for 50% funding from the EC, provided we can get it all contractually committed before the end of 1993. The bid was a joint one with a similar proposal by Calais, which is also seeking to improve the quality of the public spaces and attract investment.

IDEAS FROM AMERICA

And still on the international theme, I was fortunate enough this year to take part (at their expense) in the US National "Main Street" conference in Milwaukee, and (at mine) to visit the "Main Street" projects in Dover's namesake town in Kent County, Delaware. We hope to welcome a delegation from Dover next year, and have much to learn from the way in which locally private-sector-led groups are going about the revitalisation of a network of 800 small American towns.

CLOSER TO HOME

After some frustrating delays, **IMPACT** moved its design team into the former Martin Walter's showroom at 69 Castle Street in August. If you haven't been there already, come and see us. Ideas are always welcome. It's your project as much as it is ours and we will always *try* to make someone available to talk to you. I'm proud to lead a talented and committed team of landscape architects and planners and they will be proud to serve Dover.

JULIAN OWEN

Late Copy

The Editor has had a reply to her questionnaire from David Shaw, M.P. who answered Question A as follows:

"The new road is fundamental to securing the future of our ferry industry and is helping Dover to develop further its tourism and leisure potential. The road will be of tremendous help in enabling the development of the Wellington and Western Docks. As a result, the road will help to secure existing employment and act as a catalyst to expanding employment opportunities in the future."

AND EVEN LATER . . .

On 25 November the *Dover Express* reported Mr Mike Battle, Liaison Officer for Mott MacDonald as admitting that the opening of the second and final section of the A20 . . . "could be after Christmas" . . . "It all depends on safety audits that have to be carried out on roads and structures."