

The October Meeting

Talk by Nadeem Aziz

Report by Jack Woolford

Initially appointed as Director of Planning and Technical Services but after two-and-half years promoted to Managing Director, Nadeem Aziz, a civil engineer, explained his appointment to Dover District Council after ten years with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets regenerating Dockland and creating Canary Wharf. At age forty he felt it was time to move on and, while coveting a job with the London Borough of Richmond, he applied to Dover to practice being interviewed: and was appointed. Whilst hesitating, John Moir invited him to Dover for a week-end during which his younger daughter said: 'Dad, what is wrong with this place? People keep saying 'Good Morning' to me'.

This was pivotal. Dover, he thought, was a fantastic place with great people and great history, but didn't realise its full potential. East Kent, unlike Surrey, was very under-rated and Dover had more than its fair share of negative press and image. There were areas of economic deprivation, poor health, transport, employment and entertainment. Despite some excellent schools there were many dropouts and teenage pregnancies. As elsewhere there was a breakdown of community, with crime, dependency culture and the 'They should do something about it' culture. In addition Dover had problems as the United Kingdom's No. 1 Port, including boot-legging and asylum seekers in the front line of what is a national, international

and global issue.

The Council, he said, must join up these issues through the Area Strategic Partnership and at Regional level with SEEDA, Kent County Council etc. There must be economic regeneration via the Dover Town Investment Zone with a developer for a mixed use development with major retiling and leisure facilities in the Town Centre. Working with the Harbour Board, which has withstood the battering from the Channel Tunnel must continue, and with SEEDA for regeneration of the coal-mining areas, with 1000 new homes. Rail/freight services must be restored, A2 dualled, and A20 improved to avert Operation Stack.

On the social front we were in the Crime Reduction Partnership with the Police and through SRB and SureStart trying to include excluded communities and giving them aspiration and skills.

The opening of Dover Discovery Centre reinforced our commitment to life long learning. All this was being done at a time of restructuring and major budget adjustments because fairly substantial capital reserves had rightly been spent on maintaining levels of service and on the Deal Dryside and Pier and Youth Spaces. For fifteen stable years the Council had been safe, traditional and conservative (small 'c') and now needed to be more focused, creative and 'in touch'. Extensive and intensive consultations were proceeding, trying to accommodate community views in making necessary but difficult decisions.