

8 BRAINSTORMING SESSION - 14th October

Reported by Merril Lilley

It is customary for us to have at least one brainstorming session in the annual programme. This is always a valuable exercise. As one member remarked, 'that was good fun!'. This year the members divided into three groups, each with a committee member to lead the discussion. Jack, Jeremy and Derek fulfilled this role admirably. There were four discussion topics and I have attempted to summarise the results from the three groups.

1. THE FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

(Jack Woolford had given us some guidance earlier, by explaining the implications of unitary authorities).

If there was to be one large unit stretching from Oxford to Surrey, to Thanet and to Dover, it was felt that this would be unwieldy, if not ridiculous. Most were against it, but felt that it might, eventually, be inevitable.

One group said - no to government from Guildford! We don't want to be the poor relations! We want to be local! We would like to keep what we have - Town Council, District Council, County Council.

Some said Kent should remain as one unit, even if there were different subdivisions (East, West, Medway?)

A balance of economy was needed in each unitary authority.

2. RESPONSE TO RESTRUCTURING (SAVINGS OR CUTS?)

Following the news that DDC is to undertake a major restructuring, part of which involves achieving in the region of £2.7 million of savings in the next financial year, the groups were asked for their reactions.

Museum - The greatest reaction was to the proposed cuts in museum funding of £200,000, which is a 45% cut. Members were in strong opposition to this, pointing out that the museum is one of the best in the country, with a splendid record of successes. It was at the heart of the community and contributed greatly to tourism and

education. To cut the number of curators from three to one and also reduce the number of custodians would be disastrous and mean a huge reduction in some services and the cessation of others. It was accepted that some cuts would have to be made but it was felt that the Council figure of 45% was severe and should be reviewed. There were various suggestions, including the idea that if the temporary exhibition programme was discontinued, the space might be let to outside concerns which would pay for their own exhibitions.

Tourism - The proposed cut for tourism includes the reduction of staff from five to one.

There was much discussion on the need to keep the 'brand' name of Dover and its white cliffs and to continue to promote the White Cliffs Countryside as an attractive tourist destination. Any idea of combining with Canterbury was seen as disastrous and should be rejected.

The annual town guide should remain, even if a charge has to be made for it. It is not true that everyone has access to a web site. Town guides are still needed.

Toilets - The closing of toilets was deplored as unnecessary.

The Fountain - The fountain should remain as a favourite feature in the Market Square. It should not be fenced off.

The Town Hall - Should be kept - it is an invaluable asset to the town, social events, concerts, shows, historical interest for visitors.

Savings - How can the Council save money?

- Cut down on expensive, glossy in-house brochures?
- Cut down on expensive consultancy exercises?
- Ask the government for more help for the region?
- Closely monitor local services. Efficiency of car park attendants was questioned.

3. PRAISE AND SHAME LISTS

The idea of compiling praise and shame lists of buildings and sites in Dover was discussed and most people were in favour of this. Some groups merely discussed the feasibility and publicity angle of such a study. Others began to name actual sites, with the 'shame' list headed by the Crypt site in Bench Street, the apparently abandoned site on the corner of Bench

Street and Townwall Street, Burlington House, the former Army Recruitment Centre on the A20, Woolworths and Lidl's 9

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR OUTINGS AND SPEAKERS

Outings

Kent/SE: Amhurst Fort, Chatham Maritime Museum, Down House, Betchley Park, Eltham Palace, Yalding Gardens, Hever Castle, a local brewery, Portsmouth Dockyard, Coastguard Station (small groups).

London: Houses of Parliament, another river trip.

Abroad: La Coupole, WW11 rocket site, Ypres, Waterloo, Brussels.

Speakers

Representative from English Heritage, National Trust, Demelza House, Dover Counselling Centre (Janet Johnston).

