

# SOCIETY MEETINGS

## November DOVER TOWN COUNCIL

*A talk by Councillor Lyn Young - Reported by Jack Woolford*

**C**ouncillor Young said that the Local Government Act of 1972, which created District Councils, abolished County and Municipal Boroughs and Urban and Rural Districts councils, thus stripping Dover of most of its rights and way of life, despite charters going back to the Middle Ages. Protests led to the creation of Charter Trusteeships which allowed towns to keep their mayoralties and civic identities but not to hold property or land, have planning powers - or even create Freemen. Dover Town's property, paintings and furniture went to Dover District Council.

Dover's Charter Trustees immediately went into action and built up a strong case for Parish Council status, which was achieved on May 1st 1996. Councillor Young became the first Town Mayor without standing orders, committee structure, office equipment or even headed paper, but with the power to sign cheques on the precept (income from Council Tax) from Dover District Council. The allotments which DDC were obliged to hand over were in an awful condition and burdened with legal problems which took years to sort out but trained us in total research. Meetings in the Town Hall were too dear, the accommodation in what are now car parking services too small and liable to flooding and rented

accommodation (in Castle Street) not best value. Hence this year's purchase of Maison Dieu House. Prior to 1972 this had belonged to the Borough but because the District used it as the Public Library, Kent County Council took it over and (turning full circle) we have had to repurchase it for £300,000(!).

However, we have also improved the allotments, provided a sportsground on the Western Heights, taken the lead in HERS, completed the Oswald Road scheme, completed the skate-boarding park and constructed the performing arts platform in Pencester Gardens, supported Town Centre Management, notably in Riverwatch and the River Dour project, taken on the Christmas Lights, installing a dedicated electricity supply, supported numerous charities, built up the finest regatta on the south coast, secured Interreg 111 funding and maintained twinning with Calais and Split.

Town Councillors are unpaid. Nevertheless they envisage taking over more responsibilities, believing that Dover needs to grow to survive, with more and better (and affordable) housing and leisure facilities. The Town Council is now more democratic because members of parties other than the Labour Party have stood for election.