

Letters to the Editor



Dear Editor

I thought the Dover Design Competition was rubbish and a waste of money but I was not aware of the idea submitted by the Roman Painted House. It is so simple but says so much and would do so much for Dover and tourism. Please can I have your view?

Thanks and kind regards,
Mike McFarnell



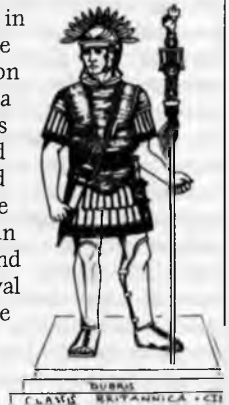
Roman Painted House entry for Dover Design competition

Artists and designers have been producing eye-catching designs for Dover after they were challenged to come up with a really exciting idea which could bring in millions for the town.

Key Element 1 of 8

The Colossus of Dover in the Harbour Area

This is a greatly-enlarged figure of a Roman Legionary, standing astride in full armour and holding a standard found in Dover in 1970. It is intended that this should closely resemble the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. That famous classical figure was built across the harbour of Rhodes in about 305BC. It was destroyed by an earthquake in about 224BC. The Dover Colossus should also stand 32m high and could be positioned on the outer breakwater, foreshore or seafront. It should stand on a podium, be cast in bronze and be illuminated at night. This Colossus will reflect the fact that Dover was the Gateway of Roman Britain and the first port of entry. All Imperial officials entered through Dover and most would have stayed in the hotel (mansio), now known as the Roman Painted House. Dover was also selected as the Roman Headquarters of the Classis Britannica, the fleet of the Channel and North Sea. It was thus the only naval base known in Britannia. The naval fort was discovered by the Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit in 1971. The importance of Roman Dover is further emphasised by the construction of an even larger Roman army fort in the late 3rd Century AD. This true Colossus, with its very long world-renowned history should stand as the ultimate iconic figure for Dover.



MORE HOUSES

As to the future housing issues within Dover and District, why do we need this amount of additional houses in the first place? The South East of England is recognised as the most densely populated area in the United Kingdom. There are water shortages in the South now. What will it be like when Mr Prescott's regional plan to build hundreds of thousands of houses across southern England is completed? Our birth-rate after all is precipitately low; it has been 40 years since we last had enough children to sustain our population level.

Part of the answer is economic, increased longevity and the shift towards single-adult households when couples split up to form two households. We then have the last recorded official government estimate (Nov. 2004) that increased immigration would be responsible for one third of new household growth. Additionally amongst others, Home Office figures show that "On-shoring/Off-shoring" is increasing by 15% annually, now at 21,448, these workers mainly from India have been given permits to be employed in the poorly paid IT industry. A work permit almost automatically leads to long term settlement. Both Charles Clark and David Blunkett have said that there is "no obvious upper limit to legal immigration" regardless that Europe stands at the receiving end of a global upheaval of populations from poor to rich countries.

So when we are asked to give an opinion on the number of houses to be built over a 20 year period the fact is actually, for the unforeseeable future, the question now is academic. We signed away our countryside when we signed away our immigration controls, isolated villages will become part of towns and bluebell groves will disappear under tarmac.

We could, of course, take steps to make the accommodation of such numbers more manageable. Make it fiscally attractive to renovate urban houses. Possibly, encourage communities to buy land and then lease it at peppercorn rent to local farmers and delay the government proposals.

We should in the meantime learn from a recent report, "Towards a Strong Urban Renaissance" which has been produced by an independent panel, chaired by the architect Lord Rogers. The report refers to John Prescott's Urban Task Force as "clumsy, insensitive, rushed, quantity-driven and wasteful" and that areas were being developed in a "piecemeal fashion without vital public transport links and failure to produce attractive living areas for families". The report blames a "lack of vision, compounded by overweight decision-making that are unable to focus and prioritise".

Planning is perhaps the key determinant of the social and economic health of a neighbourhood. Only by restoring to communities the power to approve and reject planning applications will we see buildings arise of utility, economy and attraction. Lord Rodgers recommends "one accountable, empowered delivery body" - which we call the local council. Research carried out for the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) supports this belief by declaring that when there is a question of any impact on green belt boundaries the TCPA believes that locally elected councillors, rather than central diktat, should plan that future to ensure the most sustainable outcome possible.

Jim Francis