

Sea Change Dover

by Jeremy Cope

The Society requested a meeting with Sea Change Dover organisers to inform ourselves more fully of the scheme and, if appropriate, to make an input into its work. The meeting was held at Dover District Council Chamber at Whitfield with David Hughes and Amanda Lumley from Sea Change and approximately 16 Society members.

The Scheme Overall

Sea Change is a government funded initiative in which participants must match the government contribution. Three seaside towns have been awarded the first tranche of money, one of which is Dover. The government funding element must be spent by the end of this financial year. The government has refused to allow any funds to be used for purposes other than those specified in the bid. The participants (and providers of matched funding) in the scheme are KCC, DDC, SEEDA, EH and DHB. KCC are the organisers and Dover Pride is a forum for Sea Change.

The purpose of the scheme is regeneration of seaside towns. The 'in words' for the scheme are 'connections' and 'connections through culture'. Culture is seen as a key to bringing people together to make a more cohesive town.

The elements of the Dover Scheme

English Heritage's refurbishment of the Castle, renovation of the old Officers Mess for use as an archive and the new reception building, all of which have

been completed. Dover District Council has renovated the Bleriot Memorial. A feasibility study of a cable car from the Wellington Dock area to the Castle is being carried out. Dover Harbour Board is refurbishing and upgrading part of the seafront promenade. A cultural survey is being undertaken which is part of a 10 year process to promote community engagement.

Amongst the matters we raised were:-

- Why the promenade scheme? - The promenade is excellent in its present form - why not use the money elsewhere to better effect?
- Why not make more of Shakespeare Beach with a walkway to Samphire Hoe?
- The Admiralty pier needs upgrading.
- Could the semi derelict Snoops Night Club be turned into an Arts Centre? David Hughes had thoughts on the use of Discovery Centre as such a centre.
- We understand English Heritage are carrying out a survey of buildings in Dover to list them, here The Society needs to contact English Heritage on this one.
- We should make more of the Dover Painted House -response - It is likely to be part of the cultural survey.
- Importance of the Western Heights. David Hughes said that the potential cost of improvements would be £18m - £20m.
- That the promenade plans did not address its use for the regatta or loss of beach likely with the development of

new cruise terminal and yacht marina.

- Could the seafront toilets be reopened?
- Within the connections concept safe walking paths were needed from the Bleriot memorial to Langdon Cliffs and from Langdon Cliffs to the town.
- There was a general concern that Sea Change was doing nothing to address the run down nature of the town centre and unless this was addressed the value of Sea Change would be very much reduced.

The general response to questions was that the schemes were already decided upon and could not be exchanged for alternatives. Government funding was fixed on the current schemes. Originally the bid had to be made in a three-week period which gave no time for public consultation. All that the Society could do was to make any objections to plans for the promenade in the normal way and to participate in the cultural survey. Most of the concerns expressed would have to be addressed in a different forum. Sea

Change has its limits in what it can achieve and it has to be recognised that participants who put up the matched funding have aims that may not necessarily mirror or coincide with Society members' views. The Society is grateful to David Hughes and Amanda Lumley who gave positive presentations within the limits of what Sea Change sets out to achieve.

It is disappointing that Sea Change, described as regeneration of seaside towns, tends to be cosmetic and does not seek to address the real problems of towns such as Dover. Plus ça change. But the Society is here to challenge this plus ça change. It has set up a sub-committee whose job is to see what we can do to help make the best of what Dover has, and Dover has a very great deal. This is not about the grandiose schemes but simple housekeeping, litter, buildings repair, antisocial matters etc. The first meeting has been held and members will hear more as things develop and this will, no doubt, include a request for their inputs.

Thanking the Emergency Services

A celebration for the life and work of the Emergency Services will take place on Sunday 6th December in the Church of Our Lady of Dover, Roosevelt Road, Buckland Estate at 3pm.

The programme will comprise readings, Advent and festive carols and musical contributions. Members of the Emergency Services will be participating and the Town Mayor and other civic dignitaries will be present as will the brass ensemble 'The Fortuners' and the Pharos Choir. All are welcome, admission free. This biennial event provides an opportunity to thank those who work so hard for us all year round in these services while at the same time enjoying a wide and varied programme in word and music.