

MARCH MEETING

1st Talk

Inside Stories of the Local Council

A talk by Cllr David Hannent, Town Council Deputy Mayor
reported by Alan Lee

David began his talk by outlined his early life in Dover up to the time that he left for the 'bright lights'. After working with Camden and Bromley councils he returned as a 29 year old and obtained a post as a surveyor with the Borough Council. Later he was to become the Chief Surveyor with the newly formed Dover District Council, being responsible for all the building work in the area.

At the time of the local government reorganisation the old Dover Borough Council went on a spending spree. They had decided to use up their cash reserves instead of handing them over to the new DDC.

David then controversially stated that at this time he considered that a third of professional people should not be in practice, mainly through their incompetence.

He found that DDC had inherited a fragmented surveyors department with many small offices spread around the district. This necessitated a lot of extra work and time having to visit multiple offices for each building application



David Hannent

(resolved when the Whitfield offices opened). Looking to centralise their offices DDC first considered the old gas works site in Coombe Valley Road but decided on Whitfield as the land was cheaper with better access. David was the project manager for the council and was pleased with completing the building on time and within the budget. (This had looked in doubt until the Gypsies illegally occupying the site, were somehow evicted). A little known fact is that many of the interior walls have been constructed as demountable partitions. This means that they can be moved so that the number and the size of the individual offices can be changed. He mentioned that during this period he had his job re-evaluated and his salary increased by three times as much. With a twinkle in his eye he stated that although slightly embarrassed he reluctantly accepted the increase.

David's first large project was to oversee the building of 159 basic concrete homes by Wimpy the construction company. Without any insulation or

double glazing, normal for the period, and with only electric heating this left the residents with very high fuel bills.

He then played a major part in re-negotiating better terms for the lease of the St James's multi-storey car park. Originally held on a long full repairing lease this had always led to very expensive repair bills. To deter vandalism he had wire mesh fitted over the ground floor openings. An office was built by the entrance and leased to a local taxi firm which ensured there was a 24-hour presence on the site. These and other innovative measures meant that Dover became the leading exponent in multi-storey car park management. He oversaw the Dover Swimming Pool, built by Jenner's, sadly designed too short for official swimming competitions.

Dover's street development over the year's had not taken enough account of the fact that the River Dour was only three feet below the surface. David discovered that the basements of the houses in Ladywell are well below water level, damp and prone to flooding.

While their Chief Architect he had a major disagreement with DDC. Sticking to his principles he walked away from his job and started his own consultancy company, P.M.C. Now 27 years later he still has no regrets about leaving, although the job was professionally rewarding and a lot of fun.

Just after the Dover Town Council was formed they were paying £2,000 per year in rent for their offices in the old Martin Walter showrooms in Castle Street. After David was elected to the

DTC he was one of the prime movers in getting them to purchase the old library for their offices. The roof needed major repairs and the building was totally refurbished, but some timbers are still cracking and the basement is still damp and prone to flooding. This will require treatment at a cost of £10,000 to £20,000, but the work is essential.

He became 65 years old, in February, and hopes to slow down a bit and devote more of his time to his family. This year also sees him step down as Deputy Town Mayor.

Many things have not changed in the district over the years. David believes the following suggestions for improving Dover would start to get the basics right and ultimately lead to a smarter, tidier and cleaner town - one we could all be rightly proud to live in.

1. Target areas of the town to ensure that they are kept clean and tidy.
2. Involve local people in more consultations about plans affecting the town.
3. Award 70% grants to have the frontage of properties in the town painted.
4. Award grants to help defray the cost of scaffolding to carry out repairs to the frontage of properties.
5. Get the Dover District Council to be more open with their plans for the town.

Following a question and answer session the Chairman thanked David for giving the members an interesting insight into some of the unknown workings of local government.