

# The Dover Society AGM 2015

## Report by the Chairman Derek Leach

**T**his is my 11th annual report. Some of you have had to listen to the report each year and still you come back for more!

### Membership

Our membership has risen to the highest number ever, 487 as we creep toward my target of 500. It does mean that you have to continue your membership as well as encouraging relatives, friends and work colleagues to join. Is there any business or organisation that can boast of not increasing its charges since 1996? It is also pleasing to see some younger new members. If you are new and want to be actively involved in The Society's work please have a word with me or any of the Executive. Our thanks as always go to our membership secretary, Sheila Cope.

During the year we lost Mr Jack Woolford, a Vice President and Mrs Sybil Standing, one of our founder members, as well as Mr Brian Powell, Mrs Jean Baldwin, Mr David Pennington, Mr Harry Hutchison, Mr Martin Fuller, Mr Jeffrey Steed, Mr Peter Terry, Mrs Daphne Davis, Mr Laurie Brooks, Mr Barry Late and Mr John Owen. May I invite you to stand whilst we remember all those members who have died in the past year.

### So what have we been up to?

When people ask what does The Society do, rather than trot out our formal objectives, I always say we are passionate about Dover's past, its present and its future. As always your Executive Committee has been very active on all

three fronts.

At a strategic level we continue to meet DDC Directors every 6 months to raise concerns and to hear about any progress on local projects, but let's get down to some detail.

### Planning and development

On the planning front Patrick Sherratt and his committee continued to keep an eagle eye on routine planning applications and making representations to DDC when necessary.

We have continued to monitor progress or lack of progress on the various regeneration schemes.

Public frustration at the lack of progress on DTIZ culminated in a special DDC Scrutiny Committee meeting where we were invited to speak. However, the blighted St. James area redevelopment moved forward significantly during the year with a number of commercial occupiers signed up and construction underway of a block of flats (hidden at the moment by very attractive hoarding which we lobbied for). Recently the Compulsory Purchase Order for the remaining properties was approved by the Minister allowing at long last the demolition of Burlington House, the County Hotel and the multi-storey carpark - Paul Watkins has promised within 6 months. Centurion House in Bench Street was also demolished where our pleas for trees and an attractive false facade to cover the exposed bare walls of adjoining properties

were accepted by DDC. As part of the redevelopment we have urged DDC to provide 30 minutes free parking.

The new Buckland polyclinic will soon be completed and our campaign to retain surplus land for much needed intermediate care beds moved a step nearer with the site earmarked for community use and the Clinical Commissioning Group considering the possibility (bearing in mind the big problem of hospital bed blocking).

The long standing problem of freight lorries queuing to get into the Eastern Docks along A20/Townwall Street, often causing gridlock to the town, came to a head this winter with the Channel Tunnel fire coinciding with the usual reduction in ferry capacity due to annual refits. Our regular Dover problem quickly became a county and national problem with the implementation of Operation Stack - only the 4th time since 2010. Now The Society, DDC, the Port and Community Forum, our MP, and KCC are making strenuous efforts and lobbying Government to find solutions in both the short and longer term. Operation Stack, designed for emergencies, is not the answer for Dover or anybody else. Already work is underway to halt lorries before the Aycliffe roundabout when Eastern Docks are full.

We have lobbied long and hard for the multi-storey car park to serve Dover Priory only to find that its planned capacity has been halved!

Whilst we welcomed the Western Heights masterplan for future planning guidance we applied to DDC for The Citadel to be put on the Community Asset Register to guard against any future sale by the government direct to a developer without any local opportunity to secure a future

sympathetic to its heritage. This would allow the local community 6 months to make a purchase offer, but, disappointingly, our application was rejected.

The Port of Dover's ambitious Western Docks Revival plan was generally welcomed although we pleaded for quality buildings and landscaping particularly when seen from the seafront and the Western Heights.

We supported the owner of Castle Hill House's objections to the introduction of a high pressure washing facility for cars and lorries affecting the Grade II\* property and were dismayed that the DDC Planning Committee approved the retrospective planning application against the recommendations of its Planning Department.

We have also pursued the loss of trees in conservation areas.

### **DHB: An eventful year for the port and community**

Relations between the local community and the Harbour Board continued to improve and develop during the year. The Port and Community Forum, which I chair, is proving a useful forum for the community, port authority, the local authorities and others to keep abreast of developments in the town and port and to raise concerns such as the Townwall Street congestion problem, the need to improve links between the town and the seafront and the need for a fulltime tourism officer for Dover town.

The Society was very well represented at the public workshops held by DHB regarding the proposals for the Western Docks, Community Directors and the Port Community Fund.

We welcomed the Minister's approval of a new Harbour Revision Order giving DHB up to date and flexible financial powers to allow joint ventures, the ability to borrow against its assets and to enhance DHB's contribution to town regeneration by the setting up of a Port Community Fund.

As PCF Chairman I was also involved in the selection of the first Community Directors of DHB and the Society was asked to nominate a member of the new independent Port Community Fund panel who will be responsible for spending the fund. Roger Knight agreed to be our representative and the first grants will be made during this summer. The Bluebird Heritage Trail group of the PCF which I chair has worked hard to produce a Heritage Lottery Fund application which is now with our HLF adviser for comment before formal submission.

### **Refurbishment or making the best of what we already have in the town.**

Our campaign led by Patrick Sherratt to see the exteriors of dilapidated buildings improved under the local authority Section 215 powers continued to produce results, not only those properties receiving warning letters from DDC but also others making improvements before falling foul of the law. The building at the corner of Bench Street/Townwall Street is a good example of what a coat of paint can achieve. The issue of a warning improvement letter also appears to have resulted in the demolition of the former cinema.

Our Refurbishment Committee, chaired by Jeremy Cope, continues to make an impact. Our campaign for so-called zero tolerance of antisocial behaviour, litter dropping and litter clearance both in the town and on the A2 and A20 continues as do regular meetings with the Dover police

inspector.

Jeremy & Co have also battled with KCC to make a safe pedestrian route from the Bleriot Memorial to Langdon Cliffs and have convinced KCC that it still exists legally.

Sylvie Parsons had to abandon her efforts to brighten up Dover Priory Station with flower beds as the railway authority failed to maintain them as agreed. Sylvie continues to brighten up the town.

Several members of the Society are heavily involved in the Big Local project. With its business development plans approved, the £1 million of lottery money to be spent over the next ten years is now available to help improve the town and the life of its people. With so much money now involved The Society will pass on its role as the Dover Big Local 'treasurer'.

We, with others, complained to Morrisons about the abandonment throughout the town of their free trolleys causing them to reverse their policy.

We have also sought a complete review of the town's traffic system - speed restrictions, catering for pedestrians and the efficiency of the one way system.

DDC convened a meeting recently of DTC, KCC, Kent Highways, DHB plus the Society, Big Local and Town Team representatives to discuss the need for an effective town transport system for people living, working and shopping locally, bearing in mind the various developments around the town. One idea is to use one carriageway of York Street as a transport hub cum bus station only a stones throw from the town centre and the DTIZ area. The need for better access to the seafront was once again a priority. Hopefully this

initial meeting will be the first of several intended to improve communication between those who can make a difference to Dover.

### **Projects**

On the heritage front the success of Heritage Open Days in Dover continued with once again 10 properties open free of charge for the September weekend. Our long term campaign to restore the Town Hall to something like its Victorian splendour in partnership with DDC and DTC made some progress at last with the appointment by the Steering Group, comprising DDC, DTC and myself representing The Society, of consultants to make recommendations about the future use and management of the Town Hall, bearing in mind the need for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to restore the building. The report is expected at the end of April. Interesting ideas are emerging, but, of course, funding will be critical. The Society has contributed £1000 toward the cost of consultants from its Town Hall Fund.

Our gallant band of volunteers continued with guided tours of the building every Wednesday.

Another dedicated band of volunteers led by Jeremy Cope continued to maintain the whole of Cowgate Cemetery with their fortnightly work parties.

Taking the River Dour Group under our wing enabled the group to raise funds for river improvements. Ray Newsam and his team are pursuing several exciting projects. Ray would like more volunteers to help with river clean ups and also on the organisational side.

Members Denise Smith and Liz Dimech have formed a new group under The Society's umbrella, Dover Heritage

Volunteers, offering cruise passengers and other visitors guided walks around the town.

We erected yet another Society blue plaque in January, this time to commemorate the tragic River tram accident of 1917. Our plaque commemorating the dropping of the first bomb on England in 1914 was the venue for a short ceremony marking the centenary of the event.

### **More of the same**

Now I turn to regular activities which are part and parcel of The Society and perhaps taken for granted, but no less important.

### **Social programme**

Our winter series of meetings continue to be well supported and I thank Beverley Hall for making the hall arrangements and her happy band of kitchen helpers, Mike Weston our wine waiter and Denise Lee our Queen of the Raffle. Our summer outings, organised so well by Pat and Patrick Sherratt were well supported. Our pilgrimage to First World War cemeteries was so popular that a second trip was quickly arranged. Who could forget the September visit to the Walpole Bay Hotel at Cliftonville for a cream tea and tour?

Our Christmas Feast held in the Town Hall at lunchtime was a big success once again with over 100 attending.

### **Publicity**

Our Newsletter expertly edited by Alan Lee continues to be highly regarded and we are indebted to all the contributors, Jean Marsh our advertising manager, the proof readers, the envelope stuffers and all our distributors for their efforts. The excellent website, managed by Mike McFarnell keeps members up to date and helps to interest internet browsers not only in the Society but in Dover as well. Terry

Sutton's regular press reports also help to keep The Society in the public eye and we continue to provide a Dover Society article in the Dover Life magazine. We have resisted so far Facebook or tweeting!

### Representation

As usual I represented The Society at the moving St. George's Day commemoration of the Zeebrugge Raid and we also laid wreaths at the Remembrance Services at the Town war memorial and at The Society's plaque to the Unknown Warrior at the Western Docks. Several of us attended the moving Dove of Peace event at Christmas at the former Marine Station.

### Thanks

In my report I have mentioned a number of people, but have not thanked that essential backroom boy, our efficient treasurer, Mike Weston, who will shortly dazzle you with his annual accounts, and Yvonne Miller, who has the thankless task of taking the Executive minutes, and every other member of the Executive for their efforts. I must also thank our Audit Committee and all those members who have contributed in any way to the work of this great Society. That concludes my report of yet another very busy year.

I submit my report for your consideration.

## Retirement of our President Brigadier Maurice Atherton CBE



Maurice and Wendi Atherton Dov Soc AGM 2015

Maurice has decided that it is time to retire as our President. Maurice succeeded the Countess of Guilford in 1993 since when he and Wendi have taken a keen interest in all that the Society does and have supported the Executive in a

number of ways including hosting a lunch annually at their lovely home. Maurice will be difficult to replace, but I am sure you will continue to support us from the 'back benches'.

The Society would like to show its appreciation with this gift of a tree *Prunus 'Accolade'* [ornamental flowering cherry]

*Prunus 'Accolade' is an excellent flowering tree with a superb display of pale-pink, semi-double flowers that signal the arrival of spring. The colourful flowers appear even on young trees and mature trees can be absolutely smothered in pink blossom. The leaves are dark green in summer, with some orange/red autumn colour.*

Wendi was also presented with a bouquet of flowers on behalf of the Society by our youngest member Denise Lee.