

Dover Bluebird Heritage Trail

Derek Leach - Project Manager

At long last the Bluebird Heritage Trail is well on its way. Dover Castle attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, but with this popular attraction requiring a whole day visit, the vast majority do not venture into the town. Way back in January 2014 the newly-formed Port and Community Forum decided upon a joint project to promote the fantastic heritage assets of the town and port in some coordinated way to attract more visitors.

A group was formed to develop the idea and from this was born the concept of a heritage trail linking the many sites, building and monuments of the town and port. Bronze pavement markers would direct people along the route running from the War Memorial by the Town Hall, through the town centre, along the seafront and out to the Gun Turret on Admiralty Pier. There would also be a free guidebook including a route map with details of the sites, plus a

dedicated website and a smartphone app.

The estimated cost was £64,000, excluding the time of volunteers valued at £29,000. It was clear that most of the funding would have to be from grants and it was felt that a grant application would have a better chance if submitted by a community organisation rather than Dover Harbour Board (DHB) or a statutory authority such as Dover Town (DTC) or District (DDC) Councils. So it was that The Dover Society submitted the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and is responsible for expenditure and successful delivery of the project. We are also providing the volunteer Project Manager and Finance Officer.

Whilst it is forbidden by the Heritage Lottery Fund to start any project before funding is offered, it took over a year to obtain all the necessary detailed information and estimates required to



Dover's Bluebird Heritage Trail takes flight (DHB).

submit a grant application, which was finally submitted in July 2015 for £59,000. DHB had offered the balance of £5,000. We also had to guarantee to maintain the trail for 10 years; DDC and DTC have each offered up to £1,000 a year for 5 years to achieve this and The Society has guaranteed to cover the remaining 5 years – hopefully with some grants. Maintenance

costs will include any repairs/replacements to the pavement markers, website maintenance costs, publicity etc.

HLF offered the £59k in September subject to obtaining the approval of the highways authorities to the installation of the route markers. This took up to January 2016 with the need to provide precise locations and drawings for the markers. Approval of DHB was also needed since some markers will be on their property such as the seafront. At the time of writing (late January) we are about to order the manufacture of the markers and place the contract for their installation later in the year. The guidebook has been compiled and designed and is almost ready to be printed. The project also includes community engagement (a HLF requirement) and we shall appoint in February a part time paid worker to deliver a number of community activities, including workshops on building a website, local history research and graphic design. Pupils in local schools and some businesses will also be briefed to become 'ambassadors' for the trail.

Assuming all goes to plan the public launch of the trail will be marked by a mass inaugural self-guided walk along the route as the first event of the 2016 White Cliffs Walking Festival on Thursday 25 August at 10.30. Come and join us either for the whole route or part of it.



Trail Route 130