

APRIL AGM MEETING

The Dover Society AGM 2016

Report by the Chairman Derek Leach

This is my 12th annual report some of you have had to listen to and still you come back for more!

Membership

Our membership has stayed constant (480 at present) defying my goal 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? 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. We do desperately need some new faces and fresh blood on our committees. Our thanks as always go to our membership secretary, Sheila Cope.

May I invite you to stand whilst we remember all those members who have died in the past year: Pamela Taylor, Linda Leach, Cynthia Terry, Jean Tuckwell, Ursula Cork, Sylvia Dunford, Ignace de Jaegek, Sheila Cope (wife of Bryan Cope).

So what have we been up to?

As always your Executive and sub committees have been very active trying to conserve and promote our heritage, improve the quality of life for those living now and participating in all that is going on to regenerate our town for the future. At long last I think we can be somewhat optimistic about the future rather than despondent. This means that some Executive members are heavily involved representing the Society on various project groups and forums such as the : Port and Community

Forum, Big Local, Town Centre Development Group, Coastal Communities Team, White Cliffs Country Tourism Association and the Clinical Commissioning Group.

Planning and development

Regrettably, Patrick Sherratt has resigned as Chairman of the Planning Committee but has agreed to continue for up to a year whilst we find a replacement. He will be a hard act to follow.

The Planning Committee continued to keep an eagle eye on routine planning applications and making representations to DDC when necessary. We have also continued to monitor progress on the various regeneration schemes.

The DTIZ or St James' area scheme has made substantial progress with the demolition of Burlington House and the adjoining buildings. The first buildings were completed – a block of flats on the corner of Castle Street where we were able to congratulate DDC on the quality in this conservation area. We also congratulated them on the quality of the new Bench Street car park where DDC took on board our views. However, we are concerned about the reduction in landscaping in the overall scheme compared to the original plans.

We have also expressed concern over the lack of enforcement action by DDC particularly in conservation areas and regarding conditions attached to planning approvals.

We have offered to do the 'legwork' for DDC to enable it to carry out long overdue Conservation Area Appraisals in Dover.

On the Western Heights we welcomed revised plans with no new buildings on the Heights other than a hotel.

Dover suffered terribly during the year due to disruption to ferry and tunnel operations with Operation Stack in frequent use - 32 days in total. At long last the government has taken notice and money is now available for a lorry park on the M20 for emergency and possibly general use. The Society has expressed its views on the options. In the meantime the local traffic situation has been improved by halting freight traffic at the Aycliffe roundabout when Eastern Docks is full. It is vital for Dover that this scheme is retained even after construction of the lorry park with variable speed limits to overcome the present frustration of 40mph at all times from the M20 onwards. At times, the town has suffered gridlock from desperate lorry drivers finding alternative routes to the docks. In our submissions on the lorry park and the proposed new Lower Thames Crossing we have once again urged the upgrading of the M2/A2 to reduce the traffic along Townwall Street.

Now we face a long period of A20 disruption whilst two roundabouts are converted to smart traffic lights to improve the flow of traffic.

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 and still no sign of construction!

The new Buckland Hospital opened without any beds, but we continue to press for local intermediate beds on the adjacent land before it loses its present protected status for community use.

We are concerned about the future of The Citadel on the Western Heights once it closes as an Immigration Removal Centre particularly as our application 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 was rejected.

Whilst The Society welcomes the Port of Dover's ambitious Western Docks Revival plans we are anxious to secure a quality and attractive appearance. DHB submitted two planning applications during the year because of the listed status of the Prince of Wales Pier. The first involved lowering the height of part of the present structure and removing listed furniture e.g. streetlamps for safekeeping and reuse. The incorporation of most of the pier in the new cargo terminal meant its permanent closure to the public. The Society felt unable to support the application unless (on completion of the project) pedestrian access to at least part of the Pier was restored, but it was approved by DDC without amendment. The second application concerned the Marina Curve which will serve both as a retaining wall for the new cargo terminal and as a new pier for public use. Here The Society had concerns that the sheet piling of the Curve would be unattractive particularly at low tide and sought cosmetic dressing to hide it, but it was approved without amendment. We hope that DHB's assurance that with the new East Pier that will be built as part of the Marina extension plus the marina craft and pontoons, it will be an attractive view. A concern for us is the quality of the finished project. With such a large project it will be delivered in stages and there is a lack of detailed plans currently to inform our decisions.

It is fair to say that some committee members are concerned that once the cargo terminal is built (Stage 1), the rest of the project (Stage 2 and 3 – the new marina, the cargo distribution centre and commercial waterfront development) may be abandoned for lack of funding, although we are assured that the whole infrastructure finance is in place.

Two years ago we welcomed the formation of the Port and Community Forum where for the first time we had DHB, the local authorities and community organisations sitting round the same table with the opportunity to coordinate and improve our efforts to regenerate the town. Now we have a second forum formed by DDC concentrating upon Dover Town Centre Development – regeneration and in particular vehicle and pedestrian communications both within the town and getting into and out of the town. Supporting these efforts there is the Coastal Communities Team that has produced a shopping list of projects based upon increasing tourism through improving our heritage attractions. This has been submitted as a grant application of £2.3 million to the Coastal Communities Fund which has £90 million available for coastal towns. The Society is involved in both groups.

We are also involved in the Port and Community Forum which I chair. Here the major items have been the Western Docks redevelopment scheme and frustration over freight vehicles disrupting Dover.

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

Our Refurbishment Committee, chaired by Jeremy Cope, continues to make an impact. We continue our monthly meetings with the Dover police inspector and have made known our concerns about the immigration

demonstrations with yet another planned for 23rd April St George's Day when we commemorate the Zeebrugge Raid of 1918.

Jeremy & Co have battled successfully with KCC to make a safe pedestrian route from the Bleriot Memorial to Langdon Cliffs.

We raised concerns about KCC's proposals for the future of public libraries and are urging DDC to site its new Leisure Centre within the town rather than at Whitfield.

We objected to the lack of quality of the new town centre lighting.

Several members of the Society are heavily involved in the Big Local project to improve life for Doverians.

Projects

On the heritage front the success of Heritage Open Days in Dover continued with once again 9 properties open free of charge for the September weekend. This time we and Dover Greeter volunteers staffed the Town Hall throughout the 10 days of the Magna Carta Exhibition. Our long term campaign to restore the Town Hall to something like its Victorian splendour in partnership with DDC and DTC made substantial progress with DDC accepting the recommendations of consultants about the future use and management of the Town Hall. A £39K grant has been spent on a building condition survey prior to the submission of a major multimillion pound grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund later this year. Our Town Hall Fund of £10k comprising guided tours fees and donations will be part of the match finding needed for the project. 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.

The River Dour Group is obtaining funds for fish passes, volunteer river wardens and for publicising the river walk.

Patricia and Patrick have shown great initiative in attracting representatives of the Group and Coach Travel Organisers association to see what Dover town has to offer visitors and this has resulted in 3 groups of organisers coming to Dover during the summer for a taster. Hopefully, this will be the vanguard of many more coach groups visiting.

We are actively supporting the Big Local initiative researching how to improve tourism in the town.

The Bluebird Heritage Trail project has moved into its delivery phase with a launch target of 27 August. The Society's grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund was successful and our budget of £64k is fully funded. Now we have a few hectic months left to produce the guide booklet, website, app, install the bronze pavement markers and engage the community (the public, schools and businesses) in workshops and briefings. I shall probably lose the rest of my hair!

More of the same

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

Social programme

Our winter series of meetings continue to be well supported and I thank Beverley Hall and her happy band of kitchen helpers for all their work, Mike Weston our wine waiter and Denise Lee our Queen of the Raffle. Our Christmas Feast, held in the Town Hall at lunchtime on a Sunday (the only free date), saw a substantial drop in numbers compared with over 100 the previous year despite an excellent meal and

entertainment. We have had to book a Sunday again for next Christmas. Our summer outings to Portsmouth and Oxford, organised so well by Pat and Patrick Sherratt, were also well supported.

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. We also agreed a one year trial of Facebook and Twitter. Terry Sutton's regular press reports also help to keep The Society in the public eye.

Civic 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.

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. You will be pleased to hear, if you are still awake, that that concludes my report of yet another very busy year.

I submit my report for your consideration and approval.

