

The White Cliffs Country Tourism Alliance

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The last meeting of the White Cliffs Countryside Tourism Alliance (WCCTA) was held in Constable's Tower, Dover Castle. One item will be of particular interest to the Dover Society. Present at that meeting was Neil McCullom, Historic Properties Director, English Heritage (South East).

Neil outlined a plan to eliminate car parking within the castle grounds!

English Heritage (EH) believe it makes more sense if visitors park their cars in the town. If they were to do this, they will be more than likely to contribute to the town's economy. I suspect this logic is based on the desire to significantly increase visitor numbers to the castle. There is insufficient space for cars to park within the grounds at peak times. Access for cars is via a one-way system controlled by traffic signals.

Personally, I think this is going to be rather problematic as car parking space in the town is already very limited. Shuttling large numbers of visitors between the town and castle will be another issue to be dealt with.

One solution might be to build a multi-storey car park on the site of the present leisure centre. This would have to incorporate a lift up to a much higher level with direct disabled access into the castle grounds. This could possibly cost in excess of £5million so it might not be affordable. A cable car connection was mentioned again. The latter would be vulnerable to disruption at times of high winds.

A combination of high entry costs, now £20/£22 for adults, car parking charges, as well as the cost of a cable car ride may be unacceptable for many potential visitors. A combined ticket perhaps?

Neil also said EH would like to increase annual visitor numbers from 375,000 to 500,000. I suspect this is because Dover Castle makes a very significant contribution to the running costs of other less popular (and less expensive to enter) EH properties. This desire will result in many more cars, particularly on busy summer weekends at times of special events.

Before the meeting closed, I was able to outline my own contribution to the flood barrier, now in the final stages of construction by Dover Harbour Board contractors, as part of the Wellington Dock Navigational Channel project.

I mentioned this as comments had been made at previous meetings regarding the shortage of hotel beds in Dover. A new hotel was planned as part of a DHB Western Docks redevelopment scheme in 1993. The Environment Agency (EA) had objected to a number of planned developments to be sited around the Wellington Dock on the grounds of unacceptable flood risk. As well as the planned hotel, these included a large hypermarket, residential accommodation, plus associated cafes and restaurants.

My contribution was well received by the committee. Following the meeting, members were able to enjoy a tour of Constable's Tower.