

Planning Committee

Graham Margery

Acting Chairman Planning Committee

Our Chairman Pat Sherratt is taking a well-deserved break for a few months so this is my first report as I stand in for him for a while. I am most grateful to Pat as he has mentored me as his deputy over the last three years.

I'm delighted to report that we have two new members joining the committee, Tony Bones and Charles Lynch, both of whom bring considerable practical experience to planning matters and they have already been making an important contribution to our work.

A major part of that work is in the review of planning applications that affect the wards of Dover, River and Whitfield and these last few months have been as busy as ever. It would not be practical for us to comment or respond to every application but we take a particular interest in those affecting Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas, are related to major building projects or are significant in some other way. Since the last Newsletter we have made formal response to Dover District Council in respect of 25 planning applications. You might expect that we only respond to register an objection as so often happens in other walks of life but we have a long standing practice to express support where possible. By taking this balanced approach and offering constructive criticism to enhance the proposal or protect the locality, the Dover Society has built a reputation in which it is much respected by both Town and District Councils.

The Planning Committee is always pleased to receive comments and feedback from

the members of the Society. Members can let the Planning Committee know their views on any application, or on any development that may concern them. This will help form the official Dover Society response. Alternatively they can lodge their views as an individual directly with the DDC Planning Dept. in writing or via the DDC Planning portal at <https://www.dover.gov.uk/Planning/Planning-Applications/Home.aspx>

Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs): This is a matter of great concern as the proliferation of such properties tends to depress the socio-economic profile of the town which in turn deters investment and keeps house prices depressed. Pat has reported in detail about this in previous Newsletters. Sadly, since the last Newsletter, a further three properties have been granted approval as HMOs providing accommodation for 25 occupants. This brings the total to 45 properties for 507 occupants. The situation in both Ramsgate and Margate is under much better control resulting in a shift to Dover where it is evidently much easier to get an HMO approved. We will continue to monitor the situation, objecting to further proliferation and striving for better controls at DDC.

Site of former Crypt restaurant: Since the tragic fire in 1977 and the subsequent demolition of the building in 1985 caused by neglect, the site has been an eyesore with a growth of vegetation and the accumulation of rubbish. We have pressed DDC to take Section 215 action against the owner but the council claim legal "complications" so this Grade II Listed site

has continued in a state of disgraceful dereliction. That this state of affairs should have continued for so long is beyond belief. The site is on a major thoroughfare for visitors moving from the Town Centre to the seafront and is an embarrassment to the town.

So, when DDC approached Dover Arts Development about a mural at the site by a local artist we were delighted to be able to participate in the consultation about the work. We were also encouraged that DDC were committing resources to the site. However, the proposed artwork, good as it is and certainly an improvement on the present situation, sadly does not go anywhere near far enough to bring the site to a satisfactory condition. Major redevelopment work is needed and the Dover Society will continue to urge DDC to take drastic action to improve. Congratulations to artist Mike Tedder on being appointed to create the mural but we continue to look to see even more investment from DDC to bring about further improvement.

Maison Dieu bus/cycle lane: Local residents were surprised by the sudden appearance of a bus/cycle lane on Maison Dieu Road running from the bottom of Frith Road to Castle Street. There was no public consultation about it which, if there had been, could have saved wasting public money. A number of people contacted KCC who said they would not be replying to any correspondence. According to their website the purpose of the scheme was to encourage children to cycle to school but since there are no schools along the particular route the scheme was clearly misguided. Furthermore, the barriers down the middle of the road were a hazard in themselves. Thankfully these barriers have now been removed and we understand the scheme is going to be

abandoned but the road markings remain giving rise to confusion as to whether the scheme is in operation or not. We wait and see.

Conservation Areas: The Conservation Area Character Appraisals that have been completed for Dour Street and the Town Centre are still with DDC for the approval and acceptance. Under the present circumstances we may have to wait a long time.

We continue to see planning applications to convert upper floors of properties in the town centre into residential apartments. We generally support such applications but have been concerned that the size of rooms are often smaller than the recommendations in national and local guidelines. Thankfully, the recent proposals have been much better.

Opposite the churchyard of St Mary's is 43 Biggin Street which has a bear on the wall over the shop front. It also had fine oriel windows which some time ago were removed and the openings boarded up. We objected to this and sought intervention by DDC to have them restored. We are delighted to see that the oriel windows have at last been replaced.

New Planning Regulations: There has been much reporting in the media about proposals to radically overhaul the planning regulations with the intention of simplifying the process, and allowing certain schemes to proceed without the need for planning permission and so speed up the delivery of much needed housing stock. It's interesting to that James Jamieson, Chair of the Local Government Associated quoted "The idea that planning was a barrier to house building was a myth. Nine in 10 planning applications are approved by councils, while more than a

million homes given planning permission in the last decade have not yet been built." We are only too well aware of delays in delivery here in Dover as seen at Buckland Mill, Westmount College, site next to allotments in Folkestone Road, Former Connaught barracks and of course a very low delivery of 5,000 houses in Whitfield. There is a public consultation in process which we are considering how best to

respond.

On a lighter note, the new Leisure Centre at Whitfield is applying for permission to extend their opening hours on Sunday. The reason apparently is to provide a private opportunity for naturist swimming. Apparently it's quite popular and has been missed since the closure of the old leisure centre.

Local Plan Project Advisory Group

Withdrawal of Business and Community Representatives

Patrick Sherratt

Chair Dover Society Planning Committee

As many will not be aware of what the Local Development Framework (LDF) or "Local Plan" is, I quote the definition as follows; "The Local Development Framework is a collection of planning documents that deliver the spatial planning strategy and policies for the local area".

The last LDF by Dover District Council being adopted in February 2010 with Land Allocations in January 2015. It is normal for a LDF to be adopted every ten years.

In 2014 DDC formed the Local Plan Project Advisory Group (PAG). The role of this was to comment at various stages of the LDF procedure with the objective of an adopted plan implemented no later than 2020. It should be noted the PAG is not a decision-making body and is only an advisory group. In addition to DDC Councillors there being three business and three community representatives. With no activity for PAG, by early 2017 I personally challenged why as the delivery date seemed unlikely compared with the timescale indicated in 2014. My main

concern being the socio-economic profile of Dover had declined with all six wards now being in the top 20% of deprived wards in England and needed urgent adopted policies if the situation was to improve.

When the policy was adopted in 2010 only two wards fell in this category and the DDC objective in the LDF was to "Have no areas falling within the 20% of those most deprived in England". This is sadly proof of the failure by DDC.

I have written in previous Society newsletter planning reports that a contributory factor of this decline is the failure to deliver within the 2006 'Conversion to Flats Guidelines' issued by DDC but not legally adopted by it. Also, the large increase of HMO properties as there is no control by DDC. In 2016 when I sought that the 2006 document be adopted, DDC stated it would not do so as it could be encompassed in the next LDF. I reminded Council that this amounted to four years of allowing sub-standard conversions, but again DDC would not move.