

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.

The above items, as well as social improvements, have been areas that I concentrated on at PAG meetings and felt hopeful these would be resolved by inclusion within the next LDF.

Despite the timescale, sparse activity until 2018, when a Stakeholders Workshop held on the 17th July 2018, was attended by Town/Parish Councils and many community/voluntary sector representatives. This was organised to enable DDC to deliver their vision and objectives for the period to 2037 that would embellish much in the next Local Plan. Feedback from attendees being made by a workshop method. At this function DDC gave a timescale as under:

Draft Local Plan to be published in  
July/August 2019  
Publication version to be published in  
Feb/March 2020  
Submit Local Plan to the Planning  
Inspectorate, by August 2020  
Examination November 2020  
Adopted Local Plan 2021

The timescale is considerably behind the original objective due to little activity between 2014 and 2018. In January 2020 on the DDC website a revised timescale was posted that envisaged adoption of the plan by April 2022. No doubt DDC will blame this delay on Covid19 although the timescale was announced several weeks before Covid19 restrictions!

The PAG met to give input to aspects of the plan twice in 2018 and five times in 2019. With the arrival of Covid19 the last PAG meeting was held on the 5th March 2020.

It was with surprise that on the 28th September business and community

representatives learned from the DDC Democratic Services Manager that they had been removed as members of the PAG, with no reason why. This now results in no input by business or community as the PAG will only consist of DDC Officers and nominated DDC Councillors.

This is without doubt a lack of transparency and challenges democracy within DDC.

I responded to the Democratic Services Manager as well as the CEO of DDC. Only "Auto"-acknowledged by Democratic Services Manager with no acknowledgement from the CEO.

I have raised this matter with the Chair of Deal Society who is also a community representative of PAG. The Deal Society have referred the matter to Civic Voice as the Deal Society considers the action by DDC is "an assault on local democracy". Dover Society is no longer a member of Civic Voice and as such cannot receive support from it.

The decision to withdraw business and community members was made by the DDC Cabinet and personally proposed by its Chairman (Cllr Bartlett) as Leader of Council. It should be noted that the Cabinet consists of seven DDC Councillors. None represents a Dover Town ward. The Leader represents Little Stour & Ashstone, with two members for Walmer, and one each for Sandwich, Eastry, Whitfield and Guston/Kingsdown/St Margaret's.

The above clearly demonstrates that democracy is at stake for Dover if this practice is permitted at DDC and I feel our membership should be made aware.