

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Dover Society AGM 2021

Derek Leach

Once again my annual report to be presented formally at the April AGM is with your March Newsletter, which means that I can only cover up to the middle of February 2020. Anything new of inport in March or early April I shall add verbally at the AGM (almost certainly a zoom meeting).

What a year it has been with the Brexit situation almost completely overshadowed by the pandemic – not to mention the Donald Trump saga! The Covid impact upon the Society has been, and is, substantial, but the Society is, I am pleased to say, alive and well and in some ways has been energised by sheer necessity.

Let me start with the downside. Our first and last event in 2020 was our traditional quiz before the first lockdown. The remainder of our winter programmes, including the AGM and Christmas Feast, was cancelled, as were our summer outings and holiday. Our guided tours of the Town Hall were not possible, neither could we organise Dover's Heritage Open Days in September. The traditional ceremonies that the Society attends to commemorate the Zeebrugge Raid on St. George's Day and the town's Remembrance Day service were also casualties. As you know, every November around Remembrance Day, the Society lays a wreath at the Society's plaque to the Unknown Warrior in the former Marine Station. 2020 was the centenary of those remains arriving in Dover, en route to be laid to rest in Westminster Abbey. It was to

be a very special occasion, but was impossible. In the event all that was allowed was for me, accompanied by the Port of Dover Chaplain, to lay our usual wreath in an empty, silent Cruise Terminal.

Against the backdrop of Covid what was possible? Society membership stayed very healthy at 476, with a good number of new members. Sadly though, as usual, we lost some good friends (listed in the Membership News section of this Newsletter). Our highly respected Newsletter continued to be published and distributed on time. Our Cowgate Cemetery working party managed a few sessions when Covid restrictions allowed. Your Executive, Planning and Refurbishment Committees worked tirelessly, thanks to email and Zoom online meetings, which for most of us meant learning fast!

The increased use and value of the internet was also demonstrated by our ability now to offer members the option of receiving their Newsletter printed as usual or via email. All back copies of the Newsletter (back to 1988) are now available to view on our website, with grateful thanks to Paul Skelton for digitising them as well as all the past minutes of the Executive.

With no end to the latest lockdown in sight before Easter, the Executive decided to trial an online winter meeting in January, using one of our previously booked

speakers, Jon Iveson and his subject, *The Evacuation of Dunkirk*. For the trial we restricted the audience to members only, but a recording was also made available for 24 hours afterwards on our website. It went very well with a total audience of about 80, allowing some members in other parts of the country to attend a Society meeting. More are planned.

How did we get involved with developments in the town? We managed a meeting with one of the DDC Directors, Roger Walton, to discuss various concerns. On the very busy planning front there is only space to mention some headlines. An unannounced bus and cycle lane suddenly appeared in Maison Dieu Road, causing confusion and potential dangers. We objected strongly, as did many individuals, and it was soon removed. New national planning regulations, removing many restrictions on planning applications, were resisted unsuccessfully. Whilst we were looking forward to private developers constructing quality buildings alongside the new Western Docks Cargo Terminal, we were dismayed with the prospect of buildings made from recycled shipping containers. Controversial plans for refurbishment of the Market Square are advanced, with work starting in June until December 2021, but we feel that a golden opportunity to lift the public realm has been missed. Our campaign to limit the number of houses of multiple occupation in the town continued, as did our lobbying for sympathetic shopfronts for our attractive buildings, particularly in conservation areas. Brexit reared its head with government plans to impose, without prior consultation, a Customs Inland Border Facility for freight vehicles adjacent to B&Q, with all the consequences for nearby residents, the wider community and the already inadequate road system on and around the A2.

The Society supported DDC's planning application for refurbishment of the Town Hall, following the successful multimillion pound grant application to the National Heritage Lottery Fund. The Society triggered this project back in 2010; it has been a long and difficult gestation period. We have been an active partner with DDC and Dover Town Council throughout, including a £10,000 contribution made possible from the guided tours and member donations. Whilst we have some reservations, we shall eventually have far more than we ever imagined. It means that the Town Hall will continue to be closed for normal use to enable a great deal of preparatory work to be undertaken before the major work starts in January 2022, with completion scheduled for December 2023. During this time there will be opportunities for the public to see work in progress and to be involved in various activities.

We were pleased to support a revised application for housing on the former Buckland Hospital site since it reduced the number of dwellings from 180 to 81, but we were not happy with the application to build 29 flats on the former nightclub site in Adrian Street because its height would compromise views of the Western Heights. Similarly, whilst we welcomed an application to redevelop the block around the former General Post Office in King Street, we objected to its height.

An important major task in January was to consider our response as part of the DDC public consultation on its 200 page draft Local Plan, covering its vision and objectives for the next 15 years. These range from housing to climate change and everything in between.

In addition, throughout the year, we made our views known to DDC on a substantial

number of planning applications involving individual properties.

The Society has continued to lobby to improve the appearance of the town regarding cleanliness, litter, state of pavements, public toilets and antisocial behaviour. Rights of Way are currently on our agenda, working closely with the national Walkers are Welcome initiative. Twice yearly meetings with the local police commander continue. During the pandemic, community issues such as the Foodbank and accommodation for the homeless are particular concerns.

Finally, may I thank on your behalf, particularly during this very difficult year and without naming anybody, all those members of the Society who play an active role in the work of the Society whether large or small, prominent or behind the

scenes, office holders or newsletter distributors.

Our Vice Chair and Winter Social Secretary, Beverly Hall, is stepping down from the Executive and will be missed, particularly for the refreshments at Wine and Wisdom meetings and for our Christmas Feasts. Jenny Olpin is in line to be the new Vice Chair. Patrick Sherratt, tireless and vigilant Chair of Planning for the last 10 years, is stepping down from the Planning Committee but, despite ill health is prepared to stay on the Executive. Graham Margery is in line to succeed him.

More help is always welcome. In particular, can I urge you once again to consider standing for our Executive Committee? Some of us are well past our use by date and there are vacancies!

AGM

A reminder to all members

The Annual General Meeting this year will be held on Zoom at 7.30pm on Monday 26th April.

Resolutions for discussion and nominations for officers and committee members should be submitted in writing to

Hon Secretary: Jeremy Cope
53 Park Avenue, Dover. CT16 1HD
Tel: 01304 211348
E-mail: jeremycope@willersley.plus.com

All resolutions and nominations must be received by
Wednesday 7th April 2021

Nominations should be supported by a proposer and seconder and the written consent of the potential candidate.

As this is the first AGM since 2019 and the most important meeting of the year, all members are urged to attend by way of Zoom if possible.