

# Planning and Local Government Committee

## Graham Margery

### Acting Chairman Planning Committee

Since the last newsletter, things have been a little quieter on the planning front. Nevertheless, the Planning Committee continued with the relentless task of overseeing planning applications so that, since the last newsletter, we have reviewed some 84 applications that are potentially of interest and made formal response to Dover District Council in respect of 24 of them. We are pleased to welcome Tony Tugnutt as a new member of the Planning Committee who brings a wealth of experience from a career in town planning.

**Changes to Planning Regulations:** We mentioned in a previous newsletter that significant changes were being proposed to the Planning Regulations. This was intended to simplify the system, speed up the process and in some cases allow schemes to proceed without the need for a planning application at all. The overall objective was to speed up the delivery of new houses. There were 2,398 responses to the government's 2020 consultation including a response from The Dover Society. We objected to the changes as they would not actually deliver the desired objective since the biggest problem is getting developers to actually deliver the schemes that have already been granted planning permission. Subsequently, the proposed changes have been shelved but that is not the end of the matter as the recent Queen's speech announced further changes which include the possibility of local residents being able to vote on planning applications from their neighbours. This is the headline grabbing item but we will wait to see the actual

details before we submit a response to the government department.

**Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs):** Since we last reported on the problems frequently associated with such properties, and the large number of them, the situation in Dover has deteriorated further. There are now 51 HMOs in Dover for 560 occupants, this being an increase of 6 properties and 53 occupants over the last eighteen months. Disheartening as this is, it is not just a matter of the numbers. The quality of the accommodation often leaves much to be desired with bedrooms that are hardly big enough to walk round the bed and sometimes with no communal living room at all. Much as we object to this lack of amenity, applications for an HMO are rarely refused. To make matters even worse, at the time of writing there are another three Planning Applications for HMOs waiting to be determined.

**Former Buckland Hospital Site:** In June 2021, planning approval was granted for the construction of 81 dwellings on this site, a scheme that we supported having objected to previous plans for much higher density of housing. We were concerned at the time that like many other approved schemes this would not actually be delivered but simply used to raise the value of the site prior to its sale. However, the groundwork has now started with terracing the land to the rear in preparation for the building work. So, it looks like we may get the housing after all.

**The Citadel, Western Heights:** This site which was formally the Immigration

Removal Centre is now in private ownership and members of the Planning Committee met with the new owner regarding two planning applications to bring some of the casemates into commercial use. We learned of plans to improve accessibility to the site and ensure environmental sustainability. There is still a long term plan to convert one of the older buildings into a hotel but that is a long way off at present. We wrote to DDC to support the current applications and we await the outcome.

**Malvern Road:** A planning application has recently been submitted to build a block of flats in Malvern Road. This is a modern architectural design for 45 self-contained flats which are mainly one and two bedroom flats with a few three, four and five bedroom units. The site is not in a conservation area and is not in the vicinity of listed buildings but it is a seven storey block which is incongruous and overbearing in a neighbourhood that is characterised but much smaller Victorian houses. The principle of developing this brown field site is not a problem but the scale of this proposed development most definitely is. We have written to DDC to register our objection.

### **Historic England - Historic Places**

**Panel:** In July 2021 this panel paid a two day visit to Dover, touring the town and meeting with a number of officials from DDC. Their report makes fascinating reading and is available on

<https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/committees-panels/historic-places-panel-review-paper-dover-jul21/>

The fact that they came to Dover at all is a feather in Dover's cap and they were very positive in recognising all that Dover has to offer if only better use was made of it. They saw enormous potential for Dover

and were particularly impressed with the towns very long heritage of national (even international) significance but also acknowledged the difficulties in balancing conflicting requirements in delivering improvements for the town. They recognise the problems relating to HMOs (mentioned above) saying "Families typically only move into an area if they are confident that will be a good environment for them in the long term. The unrestricted growth of HMOs undermines confidence and tends to have a snowballing effect. Controlling this is therefore important . . ." The report concludes with twelve recommendations that include a desire to work with DDC in delivering these objectives. Of particular interest to The Dover Society is the recommendation to invest in historic buildings rather than demolish them and also to set up a Place Working Group that would oversee the governance of the town and the decisions associated with it.

## **Dover Society Binders**



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