

Planning Committee

Graham Margery - Co Chairman

Objectives: The objectives of the Dover Society Planning Committee are as follows: -

In support of the Society's objectives

- Review and comment on planning applications
- Initiate and progress Planning Enforcement and Section 215 actions
- Engage with local and national Public Consultations on Planning Policy and Transport Infrastructure matters
- Engage with and hold to account the Local Planning Authority
- Carry out Conservation Area Appraisals

If any Society member has any concerns regarding any of these matters, they may contact the committee via the website or directly by e-mail.

Planning Activity:

Over the last twelve months the Dover Society Planning Committee reviewed some 200 planning applications that are potentially of interest and made formal response to the Local Authority in respect of 63 of them. In total since the last newsletter, we have reviewed some 77 applications and made response in respect of 22 of them. As ever we would encourage members to look at planning applications that may be of interest to them and make comment to Dover District Council as they feel appropriate or contact our Planning Committee with their views. Applications can be found on the DDC website or the Dover Society website under 'Planning'.

Traffic Gridlock in the Town:

Once again, at the start of the May half term school holiday, Dover was brought to a standstill by vehicles trying to access the ferry port. Most lorries abide by the traffic

signs although a few don't bother but tourist traffic in cars is just as big a problem. Bus services were suspended for a time, and residents were virtual prisoners in the own homes, being unable to go about their normal day-to-day business including missed hospital appointments. Commercial businesses were also affected as potential customers were unable to get to them other than on foot. At one point the St Jame's retail centre was completely empty. This is not the first time the town has suffered in this way and is all the more infuriating as it is entirely predictable. We have in the past raised our concerns with DDC, Kent Police, KCC and our MP but we have yet to see decisive action being taken. We will again be raising this issue which is becoming even more pressing as the new border controls come into effect in October which will only make matters worse.

Former Leisure Centre Site:

The site of the former leisure centre at the corner of Woolcomber Street and Townwall Street has remained vacant for a number of years now. Its closure was much lamented at the time as its location in the town made it easily accessible on foot and by public transport whereas the new leisure centre in Whitfield is much more difficult to visit other than by car. There has therefore persisted a hope that the old site would be used for some sort of recreational activity such as a bowling alley or climbing centre. These hopes were dashed by the publication of a planning application from McDonald's to create a drive through fast food outlet.

I commented in the last newsletter that

the proposed Pencester Road Bus Contraflow had generated an unprecedented level of interest within the Society and the wider public, but this scheme has proved to be even more unpopular with in excess of 300 objections having been submitted. We too have objected. This is a prominent site and in the vicinity of a number of heritage assets including St James Church, the Castle, the Western Heights, Victoria Park and Castle Street and this scheme will do nothing to enhance the historic setting and will be damaging to it. Furthermore, the risk of a serious litter problem is great despite measures proposed by the applicant, with the result that windblown litter will end up along the A20, in St James Church, the beach and the sea. This being a 24-hour outlet, noise and light pollution will also be an inconvenience to nearby residents.

Most significantly, this scheme will worsen an already serious traffic problem. The A20 already suffers from high volume of vehicles and, at times, serious congestion that affects not just the port traffic but the town overall. We fear that this will only make matters worse. The similar McDonalds 'drive-thru' at the Whitfield roundabout illustrates very well how queuing traffic can back-up onto the trunk road reducing the effective width of the road for all other traffic. The situation will be even worse on Townwall Street and nearby local roads given the higher volume of traffic and our experience of traffic chaos even without this new facility.

With so many objections this application will have to be considered particularly carefully, and it's interesting to note that National Highways have asked the application not to be determined before 22nd July to allow time for their concerns about the traffic to be fully explored and remedied. We wait and see.

Old Metropole Hotel:

I commented in the November newsletter that a number of premises in the town were undergoing some redecoration and repair to improve their overall appearance to keep the town looking tidy, so when scaffolding was erected in Cannon Street and work started on the old Metropole Hotel, this appeared to be something we would welcome. To our dismay, the historic iron balconies were then removed, and, with the redecoration complete and the scaffolding dismantled, they have not been replaced. This building is part of the Dover Town Centre Conservation Area, and a planning application should have been submitted although it is unlikely it would have been approved. We have raised our concerns with the DDC Planning Enforcement department requesting that the balconies be reinstated. Their investigation may take some time so again we will have to await a satisfactory resolution.

Pencester Road Bus Contraflow:

Although the public consultation closed in December we have no news yet of any progress towards a decision. We have had replies regarding the concerns that we raised but these are largely just assurances that these matters have already been considered and all will be well! Another case of wait and see!

Bench Street:

The development of the former Funky Monkey bar at 14 & 15 Bench Street moves forward with the publication of the planning application for the so-called Beacon Project which will include -

- An education campus providing training opportunities in the fast-growing creative and digital industries, expanding access and the curriculum for local students.
- A business centre, providing flexible, affordable facilities for start-ups and

small, and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to attract and retain skilled workers and provide new employment opportunities.

- A creative centre, funded by the Dover District Council and the Government from the Future High Street fund.
 - A riverside parklet, creating accessible green space for local people and visitors.
- The building design incorporates all of these elements in a single structure made of red brick. Although broadly supportive of the scheme we have made suggestions to better blend with some of the much older buildings in the vicinity. It remains a rather controversial proposal with some regarding it as overbearing and incongruous in its historic setting, but we believe this can be mitigated with the some of the suggestions we and others have made.

Trees in Crabble Avenue:

We were shocked to see a number of mature trees being felled in Crabble Avenue in the athletic ground. On making enquiries of DDC we were told that one tree had fallen into the garden of a neighbouring property but without damage to the house. Since all the trees in the vicinity were of the same species and were planted at the same time, there was fear that others may fall with, possibly, more serious consequences. As the trees were not the subject of a Tree Protection Order nor in a Conservation Area, DDC as landowner was at liberty to prune or fell trees as it saw fit. In all some eighteen trees were felled but, considering the cost involved, this is not a decision that would have been taken lightly. We are assured that they will be replaced with a mix of indigenous species.

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