

# Planning Committee

## Graham Margery - Co Chairman

**Planning Activity:** Over the last twelve months the Dover Society Planning Committee reviewed some 181 planning applications that are potentially of interest and made formal response to the Local Authority in respect of 58 of them. In total since the last newsletter, we have reviewed some 56 applications and made response in respect of 17. This is a further reduction in the level of activity compared to usual but may simply be a recognition in the slowdown of work during the winter period. 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 (DDC) 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.

**Former Leisure Centre:** The plan to create a drive-through MacDonald's restaurant on the site of the former Leisure Centre at the corner of Townwall Street and Woolcomber Street must surely be the most controversial planning application we have seen in a long time and possibly ever. There have been over five hundred responses from the public including the Dover Society with the vast majority being to oppose the plan. At the meeting of the District Council Planning Committee, it was resolved to approve the application subject to 27 planning conditions the details of which are being resolved prior to the formal publication of the Decision Notice. We understand this will include a legal agreement to provide public realm improvements such as the provision of railings around the ruined St James church which is a long outstanding recommendation of an independent heritage consultant.

Members have been made aware of an on-line petition that seeks to get the decision overturned by the Westminster government. Whilst we wish this every success, I'm afraid it is unlikely to succeed. The applicant is the only person who has a legal right of appeal against a planning decision and third parties have no access to such a process. Judicial Review is the only course of action open, but this can only assess the legality of the process and not the actual decision itself. However, the approved plan is an improvement on that initially submitted and will not be quite as obtrusive as some of the images currently being circulated would suggest.

**Local Government:** The Government has announced its intention to bring about greater devolution of powers to regional authorities, the formation of Unitary Authorities and directly elected Mayors. All of this is complex, and the details are not yet clear how this would impact our part of the country, but we should expect to see some specific plans being announced soon. For Kent we anticipate that the County Council and the District Councils will be abolished and replaced by four Unitary Authorities such as East Kent, Mid Kent, West Kent and Medway with an elected Mayor covering these regions. We are concerned that with larger authorities controlling our area, decisions will be made by people who are distant from the local situation and not sensitive to its needs. To counter this, we would expect to see a strengthened role for Town and Parish Councils. Having said all this, it is merely speculation on our part at this stage, but it is important that we give it our careful consideration so that we can engage effectively with the expected consultation process.

**Castle Hill Road & Castle Street:** You are no doubt aware of our great concern about the uncontrolled proliferation of Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) which results in Dover town having by far the greatest number of such properties compared to the whole of the rest of the district and compared to other neighbouring Districts. We are particularly concerned when this affects Listed Buildings or those in Conservation Areas. We have, as usual, objected to two such recent planning applications in Castle Street and Castle Hill Road both because of the detrimental effect of the HMOs in this Conservation Area and also because of the damage or loss of historic fabric to the interiors since this affects Listed Buildings. In one case work was started before Listed Building Consent was obtained and the applicant has now suspended the plan and is undertaking re-instatement work as required by enforcement officers. In the other the application has been withdrawn. We are of course pleased with these outcomes. Although we are often critical of planning decisions made by the Local Authority it is gratifying to see that swift action can be taken to protect what is left of Dover's diminishing built heritage.

**Malvern Road:** Back in 2022 a planning application was submitted for a development of 52 flats on land adjacent to no 1 Malvern Road. We, the Town Council, and many others objected to this as it would have been a huge, ugly block of flats over seven storeys which would have had an overbearing and dominating impact on the character of the locality. The application was refused, and this decision was upheld at appeal. A new application has now been submitted in which a number of changes have been made to address some of the reasons for refusal and these have indeed improved the situation. But they don't go anywhere near far enough in our opinion. The 5/6 storey building is still far too high and dominating

in an area of predominantly two or three storey terraced housing and should be reduced in height by at least one storey with corresponding reduction in the number of flats. There is also the question of parking. Although parking is not required when there is proximity to bus routes and the railway station, the provision of just 10 spaces for 66 potential residents seems woefully inadequate and does not reflect the practical reality of modern life in an already over-stressed residential area. This will seriously impact the amenity of existing residents.

**Clock Tower Square:** The Royal Cinque Ports Yacht Club (RCPYC) has been asked to vacate its current premises in Waterloo Crescent and is proposing to relocate to the Clock Tower Square on the Marina Curve. The planning application shows a modern structure as an extension to the existing building adjoining the Clock Tower and Old Lifeboat Station. A location on the Marina Curve is undoubtedly a good location for the RCPYC but we object to the details of this proposal. The modern existing building which forms part of the plan was built to be completely sympathetic with the adjoining Grade II Listed Clock Tower and Old Lifeboat Station, but the proposed extension does not fit at all. We recommend that the building be redesigned or relocated.

**Albany Place Car Park:** Dover District Council has announced its intention to build twenty-six affordable homes on this this greatly underutilised car park. This will go a long way to satisfying Dover's housing targets so is to be welcomed. There are no details yet and certainly no planning application, so we await developments with interest. We trust that the development will move forward under the control of the Local Authority rather than private developers, so that the scheme actually proceeds to completion and delivers in accordance with expectations.