

MARCH MEETING

DTC Plans For The Unitarian Church

Allison Buntin

Dover Town Council Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer

Reported by Alan Lee

Opening our March meeting our Chairman, Jenny Olpin introduced our first speaker, Allison Buntin, to the audience. Allison then gave an update on what plans Dover Town Council had for the Unitarian Church, a grade 2 listed building in Adrian Street. Opened in 1820, it has survived war damage and a fire in 1987, but the congregation is now so small that they cannot afford the rising upkeep costs.

During the last two years, Dover Town Council has consulted extensively with people in Dover about what matters to them. During the process, one of the things that has been highlighted is the lack of spaces in the town centre for performance, support groups, NHS drop-in services and many other things that Dovorians would like to have happen in the town. Another factor to emerge was a strong desire for a clean, safe and beautiful town to live in, this would include the preservation of its historic and special sites, to be open to the public.



The Unitarian Church

At a DTC meeting in March, discussions took place on a document exploring options, from using existing Community Centres and halls, buying a high street commercial property or purchasing the listed Unitarian Church and its associated hall. If the Council were to buy a building, then the funding would be via a loan through the Public Works Loans Board (the only legal option for borrowing by a Town or Parish Council) at a fixed rate. This would add to DTC's part of the annual Council Tax Demand.

DTC is looking at estimated figures for the purchase and managed maintenance of the Unitarian Church. The likely annual increase per household in Dover would be approximately £7 per annum for the next 10 years. For this, the town would:

1. Take into public ownership a listed building, preventing unsympathetic development or eventual demolition (most likely by an out-of-town purchaser);
2. Create a large (100+ capacity) performance venue with excellent acoustics;
3. Have the use of a well maintained, modern hall for clinics, support groups, youth hub and other activities that residents have expressed a need for.

As a result, without DTC having made any decision, Dovorians were then asked to let the Town Council know, by 1st April, whether they are in favour of public ownership of the Unitarian Church and whether they feel that £7 per annum for 10 years on their council tax would be a price they would be willing to pay for this.