

## Chairman's Report 2020

As with most aspects of life in 2020 the activities of the Chamber have been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Frustration and praise were directed at the responses of Dover District Council and Deal Town Council in equal measure. During lockdown #1 some businesses needed Chamber help with their grant applications to DDC but later the process became very efficient. As lockdown #1 eased off some businesses were uncertain about social distancing compliance and wanted council confirmation they were safe from fines and others questioned the adequacy of signage in the town centre. After Chamber meetings with both councils both issues were solved by DDC getting grant money to DTC who did the work. That money also funded Saturday High Street closures between Stanhope Road and Union road which met with both opposition and support. With our members in both camps the Chamber took a neutral stance as it had with DTC's pre-Covid proposals for similar closures.

With the loss of the main fundraising sources of Stranger in the Window and the Christmas lights auction and decisions not to press members for subscriptions while they were obliged to be closed or charge regulars for Christmas trees, income was substantially down and more reliant on grants. With the help of Deal Rowing Club volunteers the Christmas lights still went up, including a long held ambition to extend into and from trees in Union Road car park, and were switched on in conjunction with a program on Deal Radio. Frustratingly Tier 4 and then lockdown #3 restrictions meant there were soon fewer shoppers to see them. The best Christmas window competition was won by Theresa's Hair Fashions. With much of retailing forced into the hands of online suppliers the Chamber's position is that there needs to be an equalisation of taxation and packaging waste costs to allow High Streets a fair chance to compete.

Last year's AGM was squeezed in just before the first lockdown kicked in and since then meetings have had to resort to video conferencing as have most organisations. Tim Kitney of The Old Rectory guest house and Kenny Underwood of Cheeky Rascal Productions joined the board during 2020. Peter Jull and Peter Varrall were again re-elected as Chairman and President respectively The Chamber website was upgraded by Oast House Media to make it compliant with current regulations.

The Love Local marketing initiative also got their official launch in before lockdown, they have maintained networking meetings also by Zoom. Membership passed the 100 mark during the summer. The delayed flags went up around South Street and the challenge of keeping them straight has begun.

News of the development consent order that allowed Manston to resume as an airport was welcomed. The upgrade of the town centre CCTV with 24 hour monitoring was also welcomed. The decision to extend the end time for car park charging from 5pm to 6pm was definitely not welcomed.

Frequent meetings with the R&A and other stakeholders to get the most out of the 149<sup>th</sup> Open for local businesses halted following the decision to postpone the event until 2021. During the greater freedoms of the summer the Chamber chairman met with the Police & Crime Commissioner to hear that crime in Deal was lower than elsewhere and on the seafront the Chief Constable happened to pass by on his annual leave perhaps confirming his confidence in safety for visitors.

During the formative stages of the emerging new Local Plan for Dover District, although frustratingly not formally recognised as a stakeholder, the Chamber lobbied when it could for the A258 – North Deal Connecting Road to be included as a priority and that land in Deal be allocated for employment use. News that the employment land allocation at Betteshanger Colliery was to be lost to housing and then that Phase 3 of White Cliffs Business Park was to become an Inland Border Facility was used to emphasise that Deal shouldn't be overlooked.