

Chairman's Report 2021

Covid -19 continued to impact businesses in Deal throughout the year. The Chamber challenged KCC Trading Standards when they forced 2 independent traders to close when national chains selling essential goods of a similar nature and in no greater proportion were allowed to continue trading. The continuing Saturday road closures to aid social distancing were strongly opposed by some members who felt their trade was adversely impacted but were received more favourably by others.

Chamber representations on the new Local Plan included rationalising the proposed revision to the town centre boundary, to exclude residential parts of Middle Street conservation area, which was accepted and the need for employment land in Deal and progress on the north Deal access road, which made less headway. The Chamber met with the leader of DDC and their new Inward Investment Manager to emphasise that view and revive interest by council controlled East Kent Spatial in providing starter employment units in Deal thwarted by Kent Highways' objection to parking arrangements at their intended site off Southwall Road. The Chamber also met with a local developer to encourage them to pursue potential plans for employment units on nearby land.

The property director of Travelodge was cornered at the official opening of their new hotel in Sandwich to point out the benefits of them opening one in Deal and point out the potential of the old Woolworth's shop, due to be vacated by Poundland. Temporary use of the closed M&S shop as an indoor market had started gaining some traction when it was revealed that it was to be the new home of Poundland. Interest was also taken in other large buildings in the town closed by Covid or other reasons and starting to show signs of deterioration. Help was offered to the Landmark Centre and the Astor Theatre and Ocean Rooms survived to reopen post-lockdown. The Regent and Royal Leisure are still awaiting developments.

Peter Jull and Peter Varrall were re-elected as chairman and president respectively by remote video conference. Face to face board meetings were able to resume towards the end of the year. Love Local held popular networking meetings at The History Hub and Linden Hall gallery. Weather battered banners and flags were removed from the town centre and plans made for more robust replacements.

The revamped website increased the number of page views. A promotional leaflet designed by Levaillant Owen was well received as a recruitment aide as was a stall at the Saturday market. The Stranger in the Window completion returned with participant businesses not just in the town centre and numbers matching 2019 and a set of twins as prize winners.

The Open at Sandwich, postponed from 2020, went ahead almost as normal and members in the hospitality trade benefitted but there was limited addition to takings elsewhere. Increases in parking charges were objected to particularly in the late afternoon when there are surplus spaces.

It was disappointing to learn that public wifi available through the CCTV cameras would not now happen, experience in Canterbury having shown it stopped the cameras working properly. Support for the reopening of Manston airport continues although no opportunity to formally express that view has occurred since the development consent order was overturned in the High Court. Proposals for a tourist land train were supported but Covid has intervened.

Members were alerted to online scams including one claiming that Covid made air purifiers compulsory. The new mayor of Deal attended a meeting for a briefing on the Chamber's activities. The Chamber ensured that a flash flooding event that impacted traders at the southern end of the High Street was included in an investigation into wider drainage issues in Deal.

An anti-littering campaign was supported as were preliminary plans to bring a crafting festival to Deal. Grant funding was identified to complete restoration of the Turk clock but the works would take too long to be completed within the spending deadline. Best wishes were sent to Beth Robson, our long term contact at the East Kent Mercury, as she moved up north.

The annual auction of lots donated by businesses and the public in aid of the Christmas lights was able to be held again this year and raised over £2000. Our stalwart volunteers got the lights up and the switch on event was back in the street with crowds as big as pre-Covid.