

2022/23 Dover District Council Report to Parish Assemblies

Regeneration: For many years regeneration and revival have been a top priority for DDC. Naturally Covid held things back but in the last 12 months there has been substantial progress and a number of projects have been completed.

Dover Market Square: Opened in the summer with an innovative water feature and is now used for a variety of community events, including the visit of Father Christmas and his reindeer in December.

Dover Beacon project: We learned in January that we had received a grant of £19 million from the Levelling Up Fund for the creation of a new creative, educational and residential complex in the run-down Bench Street area near the Dover waterfront. Work has started and is due for completion in 2025.

Maison Dieu: The restoration and re-imagining of this wonderful but sadly outdated building has continued and will be completed in 2024. As part of the project a time capsule was buried nearby.

Fastrack bus service: The service with an all-electric bus fleet will connect the Connaught Barracks housing development and Whitfield with the town centre and Dover Priory station via a new dedicated bridge across the A2 and will open in the autumn of 2023.

Sandwich Guildhall forecourt: the re-laying of the forecourt and improvements in the amenities offered will be completed in May.

Kearsney Abbey: The old billiards room has been revamped and now offers a delightful setting for weddings and other events, supported by the in-house catering staff who will manage the main cafeteria.

Tides: The centre is tired and costing a huge amount of money to maintain. A project group has been working to establish what can be achieved within current budget constraints.

Local Plan: After years of work and various rounds of consultation, the Plan has been submitted to the Inspectorate this month and we hope that the hearing will take place in September. While it is always true that a Local Plan will not please everybody, it is an important step in ensuring that the Council keeps control of development and is less exposed to speculative applications.

Community Grants: During 2022/23 a total of £236,000 was awarded to 138 organisations across the District. We were also very pleased to receive from KCC a grant to purchase a new Community Roots bus, equipped with wi-fi and basic catering facilities, which is being used at a variety of community events.

Great British Spring Clean: This took place earlier this month and was very well supported across the district. DDC won a Keep Britain Tidy Award for 2022 for its programme supporting businesses and organisations in their clean up projects.

Affordable Housing: In 2020 DDC published its aim of creating 500 affordable new homes in the following five years. Inevitably Covid impacted the timing of this, but we are now over halfway to our target. In 2022/23 a total of 65 new homes were opened covering the social rent, shared ownership and interim housing categories.

Budget: Like all local authorities DDC is facing significant budget pressures. We will show a small deficit in 2022/23 and in 2023/24 we are projecting a deficit of £1.4 million. This can be covered without reducing services or major redundancies through the application of the smoothing reserve created last year for this purpose. It will allow us to keep the DDC element in the total council tax bill below 3%, though the increase from KCC and the Police and Crime commissioner will be significantly higher. Clearly this is not a situation that can continue long term so in the autumn of 2022 we instituted a Transformation Programme which is examining how the council can operate more efficiently and more effectively in the future and make the best use of its assets, both human and capital.

As always it has been a pleasure to serve as your District Councillors. We have greatly appreciated the support from councillors and other residents. While we cannot always deliver the results you would want, we have done our best!

Trevor Bartlett
Mike Conolly
April 2023