

Deal & Walmer Chamber of Trade Board Report 2022

The macro-economic impacts of Putin's condemnable invasion of Ukraine detrimentally affected local businesses and their customers throughout the year, just as hopes of a post-Covid recovery were rising. The Chamber was pleased to host the children of our temporary Ukrainian guests at the Christmas lights switch on.

A number of meetings were held with DDC officers and cabinet members, concentrating on parking charges but covering other issues as well. Their Tourism & Investment Manager was almost a regular. The Council has signed up to a scheme that measures town centre footfall from mobile phone movements for Deal; this showed a 20% drop since Covid. The Chamber argued that car parks are underutilised in the late afternoons and that "Free after Three" Tuesdays to Thursdays would boost town centre trade at least cost. Board members surveyed empty spaces in Middle Street car park at those times to gather evidence in support of the argument. In the end Council officers pushed through extended parking charging times to fill budget holes elsewhere. It was galling that they then allowed free parking on the Saturdays before Christmas when lack of space availability is the limiting factor rather than driver's willingness to pay.

The Chamber continued to advocate the need for more employment land in Deal and for completion of the direct access road to the A258 at Betteshanger roundabout. Meetings were held with prospective developers to encourage them to work together towards this goal and ensure that one development didn't obstruct the contribution that others might make. Kent Highways finally acknowledged that the London Road/Manor Road junction operates over capacity in peak hours and there should be no development that would add to traffic there. That came too late to add to the argument for the access road to be included in the new Local Plan. That the legal challenges to the reopening of Manston Airport were finally rejected was welcome news.

When Poundland vacated the old Woolworths building, interest by a hotel chain was encouraged with indoor market style use in the meantime. Another discount chain subsequently took on the site. Other empty shops have legal issues before they're available for reoccupation. The Chamber concurred with campaigners wanting to see the Regent brought back into use as soon as possible.

Voluntary litter pickers were commended for their good work. At the suggestion of a member, the Chamber was able to secure the replacement of rusting litter bins in the precinct. A supply of cigarette stub bins was also secured but getting them positioned was harder.

Kent Highways were confronted over their closure of The Strand for resurfacing on a day when the Cliff Top Challenge was taking place on Walmer Green and agreed to consult local event diaries in future. Deal Town Council's controversial Covid closure of the High Street was extended. The Chamber ensured that flooding impacting members at the southern end of the precinct was included in a review of solutions to flooding in the wider Deal area.

The Chamber decorated the High Street with bunting for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and presented a prize to Theresa's Hair Fashions for the best Jubilee window decoration. Frailties among the core group of Christmas lights volunteers highlighted how dependent the displays are on their time and expertise and finding a suitable succession plan proved a challenge. Sholden Village Stores was presented with the cup for the best Christmas window.

Attempts to secure a grant to complete repairs to the High Street Turk clock continued; we finally succeeded near the year end. Plans to string lights along the promenade were prepared with a view to applying for grant funding.

Peter Jull and Peter Varrall were re-elected as Chairman and President respectively. Love Local was incorporated into the main Chamber program to make best use of volunteer time. The format of the monthly newsletter was revised to make it more interactive with the website.

Membership numbers climbed from 160 to 180 mainly thanks to a brochure that was produced by one of our members but unfortunately these numbers reduced to 170 due to the economic downturn for the year.