

SEPTEMBER 2020 DDC UPDATE : PART 1

Overview

September has been the busiest month for DDC activity I have know since becoming a Member in 2015. Against a backdrop of **unprecedented financial challenge** that confronts the District Council because of Covid19, DDC's **pandemic support effort for our communities and businesses** across the District continues. In addition; DDC is engaged with Government on **EU Transition arrangements and sites linked to the Port of Dover**, and continues to evolve an ambitious inward investment plan which forms the thrust of the District Council's **post Covid19 recovery programme for Town Centre regeneration**. Linking this programme, Officers, in consultation with our communities, are in the midst of drawing up a **new Local Plan** as Central Government introduces new planning legislation and increased housing targets - work on the new Plan is well advanced. And on 1 October, DDC takes back in house from East Kent Housing the **direct management of its social housing stock of over 4000 properties** to improve service to the District's tenants. By any stretch, this is a huge agenda. That said, the District Council throughout the pandemic over the past six month has maintained key front line services, and I am proud of that.

On top of this, there have been a number of issues specific to Sandwich, in particular **Whitefriars Meadow** and the site's clearance by its owner – this is covered separately in Part 2 of my report.

Covid19 impact on DDC's Finances

A mid year review of budgets shows the District Council to have £5.4m pressure because of the loss of income resulting from the impact of Covid19. However, because of prudent financial management over previous years, DDC will deliver on a balanced budget this financial year through a combination of drawing on reserves, further Government support to cover some loss, and asset disposal should it be necessary. Work on the 21/22 budget and beyond, and understanding the impact Covid19 will have on these is well underway.

Guildhall Forecourt

Despite DDC's financial pressures and reduced capital programme, DDC remains committed to supporting the Guildhall Forecourt Project which is seen as shovel ready and potentially the first town centre project to be delivered (estimated by early summer 2022) as part of the District's wider post Covid19 regeneration programme. DDC awaits confirmation from STC that its funding contribution to this project is in place, which will then clear the way for the project to be progressed.

Sandwich Waterways

I called for and chaired a meeting of DDC, STC, the Environment Agency (EA), and the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) on 24 September, in response to mounting concern over the condition in particular of the Ropewalk and Butts waterways. This was hugely constructive, with an exchange of expert views, resulting in an agreed action plan on which DDC will now coordinate with the support of the two agencies. Priority is for DDC to complete the removal of silt from the Butts waterway, and for the EA from some key parts of the Delf Stream by early Spring next year. IDB will investigate historical pipework and sluice equipment at the New Street end of the Ropewalk waterway. And DDC will invest up to £30K on a new bridge over the Butts waterway which will allow water to flow freely. Fish management was also considered and will be reviewed in the New Year against progress for removing the silt.

Other Sandwich Issues

DDC and **Sandwich Town Cricket Club** (STCC) have agreed a funding settlement for the next three years which gives STCC and its maintenance of the Butts and Gazen Salts cricket grounds certainty. These are arguably the Town's two most important open spaces - Cllr Chandler and I have worked hard to secure this deal given DDC's funding pressures and are delighted with the outcome. A group of youths continue to vandalise the Town with **Graffiti**, although through the quick footed and unrelenting work of Elliot Allen, DDC's Community Development Officer for Sandwich, it is being removed quickly. I do hope at some point with the help of DDC's new CCTV network we will be able to identify who is doing this.

Finally, I'm pleased that DDC at mine and Cllr Chandler's request has been able to grant free parking permits to residents on the Discovery Park side of the River and who will be cut off from the Town during the temporary closure of the Toll Bridge for repairs works. **One free parking permit will be issued per affected household for the Guidhall and Gazen Salt carparks** for the duration of the closure.

Michael John Holloway

26 September 2020