

Little Stour and Ashstone Ward - Annual Parish Meetings 2019 Dover District Council Report

With district council elections due on May 2nd district councillors and candidates are under the rules of ‘purdah’, which means that while we can communicate facts at meetings such as annual parish meetings, we cannot offer opinions which could be construed as electioneering. For this reason, we have based our report on a series of bullet points.

- Financially the year 2018/19 was satisfactory, with a small surplus against budget and reserves of over £2.5 million at year end. Council tax for 2019/20 will rise by 2.95%, maintaining DDC’s position as the lowest council tax in East Kent. (Increases from KCC and the Police were higher, the latter reflecting the Commissioner’s target of recruiting 180 more officers.) Despite the final removal of the Revenue Support Grant the 2019/20 budget is balanced but in the medium term concerns remain about the nature of business rates reform and the future of the New Homes Bonus
- Services and staff: all front line services were maintained, with no programme of redundancies. The apprenticeship scheme was expanded to include legal and accountancy apprenticeships, and we have recruited a dedicated tourism manager to oversee greater activity in this area. Park and Grounds maintenance has been brought in-house. Recycling rates are nearing 50%. We are currently renegotiating our waste collection and street cleaning contract as the existing one expires in 2021
- Regeneration: this remains a top priority for DDC. The St James retail and leisure development close to the waterfront is now fully open, and the Dover District Leisure Centre opened on time and on budget (of £26 million) on February 25th. A scheme was launched offering match funded grants of up to £10,000 to businesses in our three High Streets for them to upgrade their facilities or to open for the first time. Following the closure of the Co-op in Dover Town Centre the space has been converted to a ‘Meanwhile’ commercial facility which allows potential entrepreneurs to try out their offer in a low cost, low risk environment. The Lottery-funded regeneration of Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens is now under way. We spent £700K on restoration work on Deal Pier which covered essential maintenance, new seating and the relaunch of the café as the Deal Pier Kitchen. Plans for the redevelopment of the Sandwich Guildhall forecourt are in hand but financing of this remains an issue. We have employed consultants to help develop a proposal for the future of Dover Town Hall, Maison Dieu.
- Homelessness: We are working hard to bring down the numbers in temporary accommodation such as B&Bs and the time spent there. We have bought back a number of former council houses for use as interim accommodation and are developing a plan for modular housing on three sites across the district which, if all come to fruition, should deliver 60 interim use homes.
- Work continues on the new Local Plan. We are approaching the end of the ‘intelligence gathering’ stage and a first draft of the Plan should go to Cabinet and Council in the summer before going out to public consultation.
- The Dover District Lotto was launched in January. This offers the opportunity for a wide range of local organisations to benefit with 60p of every pound invested going to those who have signed up.
- District Council elections take place on May 2nd and from then on, following the recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission, there will be only two councillors for our ward.