

WHITE CLIFFS COUNTRY TOURISM ASSOCIATION

MINUTES OF A GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 6TH OCTOBER 2009 AT WALMER CASTLE

Present: 16 members as recorded in Attendance Book – Annette McPherson in the Chair. Annette welcomed members and apologised for the late change of venue – the change was requested by English Heritage as facilities at Dover Castle were not available for the meeting today.

1. Apologies for absence received from Audrey Woods (The Dover Society), Port of Dover, Marlene Burnham (Deal Town Council), National Trust, Cliffe House and English Heritage.

2. **MINUTES OF LAST GENERAL MEETING**

It was proposed by Terry Sutton, seconded by Jon Iveson and passed unanimously that the minutes of a general meeting held on May 26th 2009 be approved and adopted.

3. **MATTERS ARISING THEREFROM**

With reference to Minute 5 Mike McFarnell told the meeting that the £500 granted to him from Dover Town Council as advised at the last meeting has been reallocated by DTC and instead of the original idea a town map is to be printed (amalgamating two previously published maps) – copies of this map will be available to hotel/guesthouses, local businesses, information points etc. and should prove very useful for visitors to the area. The back of the map is to be left blank to enable individual information to be printed thereon e.g. special offers and promotions.

Maps are available to everyone and can be obtained from the DTC office.

4. **TREASURER'S REPORT**

An up-to-date statement of WCCTA's financial transactions was shown to members present. Substantial payments, totalling £3,280 have been made during the last few months – this includes payment for Horace Holyer's attendance at the Ostende Exhibition and his distribution of DDC's leaflets (in French and Dutch) to information outlets in Belgium and France, provision of the free bus during the two days of Dover Regatta, and further filming additions to the DDC promotional video. Balances at bank 05.10.09: Current Account £734.69; Reserve Account £6,110.05 – it should be borne in mind that reimbursement has yet to be made to DDC for the cost of employing Horace in the Market Square and at the Regatta this year.

Income from subscriptions for 2009 amounted to £2,405.

5. **CORRESPONDENCE DURING BREAK**

The Chairman reported she has written to the local press regarding WCCTA's sponsorship of a free bus during the two days of the Dover Regatta – see below.

6. **SPONSORED BUS**

Together with Dover Town Council WCCTA agreed to sponsor a free bus, to be provided by Dover Transport Museum, during the August regatta to ferry people from points in the town to the Sea Front and back again. This took a lot of organising to ensure that permission was obtained from relevant authorities for the use of picking up and dropping off points and arranging the necessary promotion of the service – in this

respect the co-operation of both the rail and bus companies was generously forthcoming as was action from Dave Atkins who provided both the bus and driver. The service proved popular but unfortunately had to be curtailed early on both days due to unacceptable behaviour by a minority of local jobs who boarded the bus and caused disruption to passengers and the driver. An effort was made by Dave to counteract this behaviour and he himself rode "shotgun" for the limited time he had available but said that if the service was to be provided again two people would have to man the bus throughout as the driver could not operate on his own. Annette said that she was so disappointed about the situation that she had written to the local press about the bad behaviour of a minority and said that careful thought must be given as to whether WCCTA should again sponsor a free bus for future regattas. Jon Iveson (DDC) said he thought this is the sort of thing WCCTA should be doing for local tourism and hopes that a way can be found to provide the service again. This view was supported by the majority present and several suggestions were made as to how to counteract bad behaviour e.g. enlist the help of the PCSOs and perhaps use a closed-top bus rather than open top.

7. **OSTENDE EXHIBITION/DISTRIBUTION OF LEAFLETS**

Debbie Dainton (Dover VIC) reported that as agreed by WCCTA Horace Holyer went for four days, with a van, to the summer Ostende Exhibition and to distribute DDC foreign language leaflets to TIC outlets along the French and Belgium coastal areas – more than 20 boxes of leaflets went – the total cost to WCCTA for the trip was just over £1,000. Horace reported that the whole trip was a success and it certainly helped that he is able to speak relevant languages. The Ostende exhibition was attended by 260,000 visitors – unfortunately he felt that the lack of a direct link across the Channel from Belgium to Dover probably deters some Belgian nationals from travelling to England but all in all he was able to speak to many potential tourists and promote all that this area has to offer in the way of attractions etc. The Chairman thanked Horace for his efforts and also expressed thanks to SeaFrance for providing Horace with free passage, and to DDC and Wallets Court for their contributions to the project.

8. **LD LINES**

Terry Sutton reported that unfortunately LD Lines is not proving to be quite as successful an addition to the cross-Channel links as was hoped. The company has already stopped its Dover-Dieppe service and is intending to replace its fast ferry service with a conventional ferry in the near future.

9. **DOVER CASTLE REFURBISHMENT**

The general consensus of the meeting was that there has been a very positive feedback from visitors to the refurbishment of The Keep. Bill Hamblin (DGHA) said that he was finding it much easier to sell the Castle to his guests and he has heard no objections regarding the increased price of entry. Horace said that some tourists he spoke to felt the entrance fee was too high particularly for visitors with only limited time for their visits. Debbie Dainton said that visitor numbers to the Castle did not suffer as a result of the closure of some parts during the refurbishment and that the added attractions will hopefully have a positive affect on the short-break market. Terry reported that other parts of the Castle will be closed off soon due to further remedial work. Mike McFarnell (WCHGHG) said that the refurbishment has been done by extremely skilled artists and the end result is excellent encouraging a huge increase in visitors – the question now is how can visitors to the Castle be persuaded down into the town? A question was raised as to whether tickets to the Castle can be sold on the Dover Transport Museum tour bus used by cruise passengers and whether this prevents those visitors from using the town facilities as the bus goes directly from the ship to the Castle. It was pointed out that the Dover Transport Museum bus is contracted by the cruise agents and that it is they who decide on its operation. Debbie said she would confirm with Dave Atkins what the position is in regard to his bus operation on cruise call days.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman asked members whether it has been a good year for their businesses and was delighted to hear that in most cases business has been booming. This is attributed partly to the weak pound/strong euro. Both Dover and Sandwich VICs reported increased visitor numbers – Dover up by 16% and Sandwich by 20/25%.

Mike McFarnell said that if the strong euro persists WCCTA should produce some positive ideas to take advantage of the situation. He said that the Dover Town Mayor is taking a strong initiative with Dover Town Council to help businesses and tourism in Dover and is anxious to have input from all interested parties so that ideas can be progressed step by step with local organisations fully involved. One major initiative is to improve signing within the town area, particularly in regard to pedestrian signing. Mike said that he has sent an e-mail to Christine Waterman at DDC with several ideas of his own particularly in regard to the Rolls Royce anniversary celebrations. The Chairman said that WCCTA is anxious to support its members but cannot do so if it is not informed as to what is required and suggests that Mike sends her a copy of aforesaid e-mail so that the WCCTA executive can discuss his ideas. Jon Iveson said that the Executive will welcome and discuss any ideas from members that potentially result in a benefit to promotion of tourism throughout the WCC district.

Mike said more should be done to promote the Charles Rolls' anniversary next year, through websites in particular. Lessons should have been learned from this year's Bleriot celebrations which although a success could have been better promoted. Jon replied that discussions are presently ongoing in respect of the Rolls' anniversary but that the situation is not straight-forward as other interests away from Dover are involved. However he could reveal that there will be a display in the Dover Museum to mark the occasion.

Roger Walkden reported that his 30,000 copies of his Dover promotional leaflet have been distributed and that he wants to print a further 10,000 copies. He told the meeting that the leaflets have proved very popular and that although there are several boxes of the foreign print run he felt that a re-print of the English version is justified. Roger said he has a shortfall of £400 for funding the reprint and asked that WCCTA consider contributing this amount. The Chairman pointed out that DDC's leaflet covers much of the information in Roger's leaflet plus it includes the whole of White Cliffs Country – which, of course, is a pre-requisite of anything that WCCTA should consider supporting. It was also pointed out that the leaflet is primarily advertising local businesses and it was suggested that perhaps some of them may be persuaded to contribute finance for the re-run as it is to their benefit. The matter was discussed and it was agreed that the Executive should be given authority to decide whether or not £400 should be granted to Roger for his declared purpose.

In answer to a query from the floor Terry Sutton said that the Greeters' Programme appears to be operating successfully and is being extended to include the Shepway area. There is still some opposition to the 2-week advance notice requirement but this is necessary for the safety of the greeters and in order to match the visitor with a greeter who has the required local knowledge. At present there are approximately 56 greeters and it is hoped to increase this number considerably by 2012.

There being no further business the meeting ended. The Chairman expressed her thanks to the staff at Walmer Castle for providing the room and refreshments for this meeting.

Following on from the meeting the following message was received in response to questions regarding Dover Transport Museum tour bus:

Dave is still struggling with the viral infection that the William Harvey have assured me he has, recovery it has been suggested "will be slow". The Dover Regatta bus did have problems with troublesome youths and Dave will be submitting a report to WCCTA when he is well enough.

The cruise ship bus service does go firstly to the Castle then to the town centre and back to the ships. Earlier this year we commenced a joint bus ticket / castle entry as an alternative to just a bus ticket. The castle also agreed to open by 09.00 when a POC ship was in. This was to combat the HUGE number of passengers who got off the bus at the Castle took one look at the prices board and got straight back on the bus Day visitors will not hang about until 1000 and often go to Canterbury instead, when Dave is feeling better he will discuss it with you further.