

WHITE CLIFFS COUNTRY TOURISM ASSOCIATION

MINUTES OF A GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 8TH DECEMBER 2009 AT THE GUILDHALL, SANDWICH

Present: 13 members as recorded in Attendance Book – Annette McPherson in the Chair.

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming those in attendance and expressing thanks to Tracey Ward for providing facilities for today's meeting.

1. Apologies for absence received from: Jane Martin (Tours of the Realm), Jon Iveson (DDC), Mr & Mrs Morgan (No4 Cliffe House), The Bell, Steve Lang (English Heritage), Richard Mahoney (Dover Tours), Marlene Burnham (Deal Town Council) and Jenny Kemp (The National Trust)

2. MINUTES OF LAST GENERAL MEETING

It was proposed by Terry Sutton, seconded by Tracey Ward and passed unanimously that the minutes of a general meeting held on 6th October 2009 be approved and adopted.

3. MATTERS ARISING THEREFROM

Mike McFarnell said that the Dover Town Map mentioned at Minute 3, is now available for distribution. He confirmed that the map was sponsored by funds provided by Dover Town Council and WCDHGHG - WCCTA made no contribution.

4. TREASURER'S REPORT

Balances at bank as at 07.12.09: Current Account £509.69; Reserve Account: £4,810.05. Since April 2009 a total of £4,805 has been paid out – the major payments include £1,525 for Horace Holyer's employment, £975 for the Dynamic Video (DDC), £1,041 for attendance by Horace at the Ostende Travel Exhibition and leaflet distribution in Belgium/France, £700 for provision of regatta bus, £350 for DDC brochure launch and travel show. Donations were also given in respect of Ray Haines and Keith Southey. Membership subscriptions amount to £2,405. The Chairman reported that there are no outstanding debts.

5. SPONSORED BUS FOR 2009 REGATTA

Dave Atkins reported that the bus, sponsored by WCCTA was intended to carry passengers, free of charge, from the railway and bus stations to the regatta on both days. Unfortunately it had not been particularly well used carrying approximately 20-24 passengers each day. Dave felt this may have been due to lack of sufficient pre-promotion in regatta publicity and/or that the bus stop at the regatta could not be seen from the sea front (at De Bradelei's). Also it may be that the majority of the public was not arriving at the train and bus stations – a park and ride might be a better option. Apart from these considerations there was also a problem with bad behaviour from local yobs which resulted in the bus service being curtailed early afternoon on each day (as reported at the last meeting). Dave said that if WCCTA intended to sponsor a similar effort next year the basic format needs to be looked at again and it will have to be borne in mind that two people will be needed at all times to safely operate the bus. The Chairman thanked Dave for providing the service and said she fully appreciated the

difficulties that were experienced by his driver and himself. She added that Nick Bailey (Dover Regatta) was pleased that the Association had come up with the idea and that he would be asked to be more involved in the planning should it be decided to repeat the operation next year.

6. SPECIAL OFFERS – DDC WEBSITES

Debbie Dainton said that hotels and guest houses will be able to put their special offers, highlighted by a star, on Guestlink. It is hoped to also include attractions in the scheme and after Christmas Debbie will be contacting members with instructions as to how to log on to Guestlink and how to monitor results. Debbie said that this method of promoting special offers of guest houses, attractions etc. is not only more cost effective than printed literature but will be more widely accessible. The Visit Kent website will also carry special offer details. The Chairman said she hoped members would take full advantage of this method of advertising as they will be able to monitor and/or change their special offer details at any time – an option not available with printed advertising.

7. DDC FUNDING/TOWN COUNCIL FUNDING

Tracey Ward outlined the expected affects that the cut-backs in funding from Dover District Council would have on Sandwich Town Council's ability to maintain its local amenities. She said that in all probability DDC will be forced to withdraw funding for non-statutory facilities provided by town and parish councils. Consequently Sandwich TC will have to find £6/7,000 to keep the TIC operating, which it is determined to do. Unfortunately there will be insufficient money available to keep all the town play areas and public conveniences maintained and it is proposed that only the play area and public conveniences on the Quay (newly upgraded to a high standard) will continue to be the responsibility of STC. Trevor Bond said that a similar situation will arise in Deal – Deal TC is determined to keep operating its TIC and will look at its overall finances with a view to evaluating where available funds can best be used for the benefit of the town. Trevor said that every council in the country is facing the same problems in regard to finance.

Debbie added that visitor numbers at all three towns' TICs were considerably up this year in comparison to 2008.

Mike McFarnell said that it is likely the Dover District Chamber of Commerce will play a major role in promoting the town next year having appointed a Business Support Officer. The Chairman said she is to attend a meeting with an executive from the Chamber of Commerce later in the week and will report any relevant outcome to members at the next General Meeting.

In answer to a query from Terry Sutton, Debbie said that updated figures will be available next year as to how much tourism contributes to the district's economy.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Lady Fitzwalter reported that Goodnestone Park Gardens has enjoyed a good year and prospects for 2010 are even better.

Debbie Dainton reported the formation of a DDC sub group for the Open Golf which will identify where the budget should be deployed. DDC will be working with accommodation providers as in 2003. Debbie also reported a new DDC website will be launched after Christmas, a 2 for 1 offer is being negotiated with SE trains and DDC leaflets will be going into SE train stations. Debbie is also working with Visit Kent and Tourism SE on an Accessibility Audit.

Mike McFarnell said that a new website, www.dovertownguide.com, will hopefully prove another helpful way of marketing the town. Mike also said that there will be a national Tourism Week in March 2010. Debbie said she will obtain details of this from Visit Britain and send them out in a DDC newsletter.

Dave Atkins reported that the Dover Transport Museum has not had a particularly good year despite extra efforts made to attract visitors, including the offer of free coach transport for school children. Unfortunately opening times are restricted by the ability to staff the premises with volunteers but it is always available for parties to visit by prior arrangement.

The question of the bus Dave operates for cruise line passengers was raised by a member at the last meeting, Dave gave the following details: The bus is run by Classic Omnibuses, of which Dave is sole proprietor and which is entirely separate from Dover Transport Museum. The bus operates on port of call days only. The bus runs between 8.30 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. picks passengers up from the cruise terminal, takes them up to the Castle, down to the town centre and back to the ship. Tickets are purchased from the driver on boarding. At the moment it is not known what English Heritage will do regarding any discounts available to passengers next year but quite a few passengers in the past have refused to pay the full entry fee saying it is too expensive for the short time available to them. Phillipa Sims (EH) said she will speak to Steve Lang about discounted tickets and also about the Castle's opening hours – although on cruise call days the Castle does open earlier. Phillipa also said that the Time Team has been filming the developments at the Keep all through the year and this will be put out on 19th December – this should encourage more visitors to the Castle and to Dover in the future. Mike McFarnell said that EH might reconsider offering discounts to local hotel and guest houses which it used to do in the off season and which proved popular with their visitors.

At the Chairman's request Phillipa read out a reply Steve Lang has emailed to Richard Mahoney in response to his comments sent to EH regarding opening hours at Dover Castle. This is a précis of that reply: In essence the cut back on opening hours is due to economic pressures – the government grant received by EH has not kept pace with inflation, thus in real terms has reduced and as visitor income is insufficient to cover the shortfall some opening hours were reduced in order to have funds to maintain EH properties. A review of all properties was undertaken in 2003 firstly to ensure opening hours reflected visitors needs and secondly to effect economies and ways of maximising resources. This review resulted in reduction of opening hours in approximately 50% of EH properties – in some instances opening hours were extended. The position at Dover is that whereas 280,000 visitors are attracted annually only 6% of those visit between November and February – thus a substantial loss is experienced during those months. By a small reduction in opening hours (only 144 across the three months) major savings are achieved. This does not reflect a lack of commitment by EH to Dover, or to other Kent properties. The savings made are in fact invested in projects and events generating additional income e.g. the Great Tower which opened this summer, and anticipated work on the Secret Wartime Tunnels in 2011. Opening hours are kept under constant review and if the current position can be improved upon then it will be.

Liz Dimech said that in her experience it was the summer hours that caused a problem for her guests. Phillipa replied that in August the Castle does open from 9.30 a.m. until 6.00 p.m. Phillipa said she will relate all comments made today to Steve Lang.

There being no further business the meeting ended with the Chairman wishing all members a Happy Christmas. Next meeting will be an AGM towards the end of January 2010.