

WHITE CLIFFS COUNTRY TOURISM ASSOCIATION

MINUTES OF A GENERAL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 14TH APRIL 2009 AT DOVER TOWN COUNCIL OFFICES

Present: 13 members as recorded in Attendance Book. Annette McPherson in the Chair. Annette expressed her apologies saying that she must leave the meeting at 11.30 a.m. for a hospital appointment – following her departure Terry Sutton will take the Chair.

1. Apologies for Absence received from Hardicot Guest House, No.1 Guest House, Jenny Kemp (National Trust), Tracey Ward (Sandwich Town Council), Peter Norris (Sutton Vale Country Club), Debbie Dainton (Dover VIC), Lynne Lee (The Bell Hotel).

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 2nd December 2008 be approved and adopted.

3. MATTERS ARISING THEREFROM

Terry Sutton (Dover Society) noted that at the last meeting it was expected that the new Dover Water Sports Centre would open on March 29th 2009. Mike McFarnell said that he believed that the month quoted should have been May but at present he has no firm information as to the actual opening date.

Brian Philp (Roman Painted House) asked if there has been any reaction from English Heritage in regard to the matter raised at para.3 of AOB which related to the restricted access to parts of Dover Castle during renovations. Steve Lang (English Heritage) confirmed that entry prices have not been reduced but that as part of the admission fee supplemental tours under the title "Hidden Dover" are being offered and have proved very popular with visitors. Steve said that the possibility of "Grounds only" passes is being considered for cruise passengers because of the limited time available to them. Adeline Reidy (WCDHGHG) suggested that this idea would also appeal to the many visitors staying one night only in local hotels and guest houses as they too have limited time in Dover.

4. TREASURER'S REPORT

WCCTA's present funds at the bank total £6,107.44. WCCTA's contribution to the hospitality offered at the launch of the White Cliffs Country guide and Greeters' programme amounts to £100. WCCTA is also committed to £350 for a stand at the Travel Trade Show which took place on March 29th at the Cruise Terminal. A contribution of £500 has also been made to the Greeters' project.

Richard Mahoney (White Cliffs Boat Tours) said that if funds are available Crabble Corn Mill would welcome a donation of £100 to renovate a historic horse drawn cart presently in a state of disrepair. It was pointed out that Crabble Corn Mill is no longer in membership of the Association and it may not therefore be an appropriate use of funds. Richard said he would also like the Association to meet the costs of the maintenance of Horace Holyer's cart in the Market Square – Richard has undertaken this work himself each year at his own expense. The Chairman said the Executive will consider this request after Richard provides an estimate of cost for the work.

Richard then proposed that in order to help local charity attractions WCCTA should offer free membership. Brian Philp supported this proposal saying that he anticipated a very difficult financial year for the Roman Painted House and for other local charities such as Crabble Corn Mill and free membership of WCCTA would be welcome. There was a considerable debate on this subject with diverse views being expressed. Several proposals were made but abandoned with no vote being taken. Points that were raised included the lack of information available as to how many charities would be likely to apply if free membership was offered; how would full-paying members react – especially small businesses - as everyone is facing an uncertain financial year. Patrick Williams (SeaFrance) said that in his opinion this was not a matter on which a decision could be taken at this meeting – it should be put on an agenda for a future meeting in order that all members have the chance to express their opinions and vote on the issue. The Chairman agreed that this procedure should and would be followed.

At this point in the meeting Councillor Diane Smallwood, the Town Mayor of Dover came into the meeting and the Chairman was able to thank her for the support given to WCCTA by Dover Town Council in the form of a grant in the sum of £3,700 to cover the cost of Horace Holyer's employment in the Market Square and to enable the Association to hire the Dover Transport Museum open-top bus for the duration of this year's Dover Regatta for ferrying visitors between the town/station and the sea front. Councillor Smallwood replied that DTC is delighted to help an Association such as WCCTA and is very appreciative of the support it gives local businesses and attractions and the efforts made to encourage and promote tourism throughout the area. She added her good wishes on behalf of DTC for WCCTA's plans for the coming year. Councillor Smallwood left the meeting.

The Chairman confirmed that in regard to this grant an official letters of thanks has been sent to Dover Town Council. A letter has also been sent to the local press to publicise the generosity of DTC. Debbie Dainton (Dover VIC) has also been thanked by letter for all the work she did in preparing an application for a grant from DTC.

The Chairman left the meeting – Terry Sutton took the Chair.

5. LAUNCH OF WCC GUIDE & GREETERS

Jon Iveson (DDC) said that a successful launch of both the 2009 WCC Guide and the Greeters' programme took place at The Salutation, Sandwich, last month. Sixty people were present to hear a very interesting talk by Councillor Kit Smith outlining DDC's tourism plans for the future and what it is doing in regard to development.

Richard introduced Mary Griffin who he brought as a guest to the meeting Mary being the organiser of Dover Greeters. Mary told the meeting that the Greeters have only been operating for two weeks. She said it is not an "on demand" service and requires 14 days notice of arrival. A variety of greeters are involved, all having different interest which they are eager to pass on to both visitors and newcomers to the district. The programme is co-ordinated by Visit Kent and bookings come via that source. Several members commented that the 14 days notice is impractical in a town that caters mostly for one night stays and it will be difficult to ensure that visitors from areas other than Kent are aware of this restriction if Greeters' leaflets are available only in VICs in Kent. Adeline Reidy (WCDHGHG) said that displaying leaflets in local hotels and guesthouses would be useless as guests would see them only on arrival which would obviously be too late. Mary said that because of the small number of greeters presently available the 14 days' notice is essential. Jane Martin (Tours of the Realm) said that hopefully in time more people will be recruited as greeters and the time span could be reduced. There are links to the Greeters website from other tourism sites including DDC's & stayindover (hoteliers) so it is hoped that potential visitors will become aware of the scheme when booking accommodation in advance.

Terry thanked Mary for her helpful information.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Trevor Bond (The Ramada) asked whether anything further has developed in relation to LD Lines. Terry said that a letter has been received by the Association asking if it could arrange for hospitality for journalists from Boulogne on a one-day visit and journalists from Dieppe on a two-day visit (which would include an overnight stay). The journalists would want to explore Dover and its environs and visit attractions etc.

A maximum of six journalists would be involved, and hopefully this could be reduced to two from Boulogne and two from Dieppe. Terry said that WCCTA has hosted such visits in the past both from Flanders and from Calais and although the visits have been hailed a success it has not been possible to gauge what, if any, financial benefits have been gained in the form of additional tourists from those areas. The cost of entertaining the journalist was high – probably in the region of £1,000.

Mike McFarnell (WCDHGHG) was of the opinion that the Association could not afford this exercise. Patrick Williams suggested that all members should be contacted to ask them if they, individually, would be willing to offer some form of hospitality to these journalists and if so they should contact Nick Stevens direct – he being the PR man organising LD Lines publicity in regard to that company's inbound tourism initiatives. This suggestion was supported by the majority of members.

Brian Philp said he was puzzled to read in the 2009 AGM minutes that Richard's suggestion for an attractions "passport" was deemed to be inoperable as such a scheme successfully operated for two years in the past and only folded then because no-one could be found to handle the administration. There is no longer any difficulty in this respect (Brian and Richard intending to take on the administration themselves) and it is hoped to get a scheme up and running by 1st June. At present participants will be The Roman Painted House, White Cliffs Bus and Boat Tours, Crabble Mill, and hopefully other attractions such as Dover Museum will come on-board. Brian said at this stage he is looking to WCCTA for a) support of the scheme in principle and b) a contribution of £380 for the printing of leaflets and passports. A discussion on this matter ensued. Several opinions were expressed including the fact that visitors staying one night often have time to visit one attraction only and thus a passport would not appeal. It was also agreed that visitors would expect Dover Castle to be included on the passport – Steve Lang said that English Heritage already has many different entry price structures and even with a discount, price of entry would be too high to include Dover Castle in any such scheme and he would need to investigate the matter more thoroughly. Trevor Bond said that Canterbury runs a successful passport scheme which includes all its main attractions and suggested that Brian should look into that scheme before proceeding further with his own. Terry pointed out that WCCTA could not properly contribute funds to any scheme that was not district wide. Jon Iveson said that he would also require a lot more detail about the scheme as his involvement in the previous one showed him how difficult it is to administer, especially in relation to sharing out the proceeds amongst the participants. Trevor Bond suggested that instead of asking for WCCTA support Brian should approach Dover Town Council as it has funds available for such projects that would benefit the town and it seems more appropriate to apply there especially as commercial, as well as charitable interests, are involved.

It was finally agreed that this is again an issue for the whole membership and no decision can be taken at this meeting but that it could be put on the agenda for the next general meeting after having been previously discussed by the Executive.

At this point Brian Philp said he assessed from what has been said during this discussion that he did not have sufficient support from the members present and therefore he withdrew his request for funding from WCCTA for the passport scheme.

Mike Morgan (No.4 Cliffe House) said that discussions at this meeting have shown how important it is that the Association has a laid-down procedure in regard to items involving expenditure and said the Executive should look into the whole matter so that misunderstandings can not arise.

There being no further business the meeting ended.