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MP says he has found a way to keep town's Banksy artwork

by Sam Lennon
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Dover's Banksy artwork could be saved by the district council, the town's MP says.

Charlie Elphicke is fighting to keep the piece in the town which is at risk of being removed by the building's owners.

Mr Elphicke has found it can be preserved through standard council planning powers.

He was told by Historic England's planning director, Dr Andrew Brown, that Dover District Council "has powers to safeguard the mural through normal development control measures".

Mr Elphicke said: "This is great news. We now know the council can save the Banksy after all - whether that's through retrospective permission, stop notices, new planning applications, or other control measures.

"I have passed this information to the council and urged them to do the right thing."

Mr Elphicke had applied to Historic England to have the artwork listed but Dr Brown had told him it doesn't meet the group's test of "special architectural or historic interest".

The mural had suddenly appeared on May 7 on the flank wall of the former Shakespeare Hotel at the corner of York Street and Townwall Street.

It has a Brexit theme, showing a workman on a ladder chipping away one of the 12 stars of the EU flag.

The building's owners, the Godden family of Folkestone, said they were exploring options for the removal or sale of the piece.

Mr Elphicke launched a campaign in June to save the artwork and keep it in the town.

It is understood that the former Shakespeare Hotel building, later Castle Amusements, was due for demolition. But the council has confirmed there is no demolition order against it. The building forms



The Banksy mural in Dover



Dover MP Charlie Elphicke launches his Save our Banksy Campaign at York Street, Dover with local people

part of DDC's waterfront development plans but the masterplan is not yet finalised.

Mr Elphicke said: "There is still time to do the right thing and preserve this asset.

"I had hoped the Banksy would be listed and given the greatest possible protection. But I'm delighted Historic England have confirmed Dover District Council can save this

much-loved artwork. People have travelled across the country to come and see it. It's a massive draw for visitors to Dover and we need to make it the centrepiece of any new devel-

opment. Dover is the Banksy's rightful home. To demolish it would be a crime against culture."

DDC's cabinet had in June agreed to explore options available to preserve the mural.

But at the time they felt that as the council didn't own the building they had no control over what happened to it.

The mural could be worth £1m and was destined to be sold to the highest bidder.

Councillors agreed that it should be preserved "as a matter of urgency" in some shape or form, not necessarily on the same site.

They agreed that whatever is done with it should not impede the Dover Western Docks Revival development or the town centre redevelopment.

Leader Paul Watkins then explained that the council would not buy the artwork but would help the owners keep it in Dover if they wished.

He said this week that the council's position had not changed.

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