



News from your local Conservatives

Maidstone & The Weald Matters

with **Helen Grant**
Prospective MP for Maidstone & The Weald

ISSUE No 5
RURAL EDITION Winter 2009/10



INSIDE PAGE 2
Shadow Agriculture Minister to Visit



INSIDE PAGE 3
Giving Rail Passengers a Lift



INSIDE PAGE 3
Helen & Ann: Working together for YOU

CRANBROOK: 'NO TO PARKING CHARGES'

"The voices of thousands of people in and around Cranbrook must be heard," Helen Grant said after she put her name to the petition calling on Tunbridge Wells council to ditch proposals to bring car park charging to the town. Helen's name, signed at Linda Page's newsagent shop in Cranbrook High Street, was among more than 4,300 delivered by Parish Councillor, Anne Marley, to Tunbridge Wells town hall.

"A move like this could seriously damage the town's economy which is already fragile because of the

Outcry over plans for parking fees

by Angela Cole
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PEOPLE will hopefully have the chance to have their say about controversial plans to introduce parking charges. A report commissioned by Tunbridge Wells council has recommended introducing fees to park in areas including Cranbrook, which currently has free parking. Hundreds of people have signed petitions opposing the idea. Today (Friday), the council's cabinet will discuss the plans, which could then go out to public consultation. The suggestion to bring in charges has prompted an outcry among locals, shoppers and business leaders, and several petitions are circulating. Last week, more than 500 letters opposing the plans were handed in to the borough council and a parish council petition has more than 4,000 signatures. Two members of Cranbrook Parish Council will be attending the meeting, along with members of the Weald Business Association.

Feedback

Chairman of the...
Cllr Peter Nor...
we will be able...
a chance to g...
tive local...

Parish Councillor Anne Marley Delivers 4,300 Protests to Tunbridge Wells Town Hall



looking at 'Short Stay' as well as 'Long Stay' parking issues.

Residents have complained that the scheme would have a significant effect on their quality of life.

"Workers, many on minimum or low wages, who need to come into town and park all day, are vulnerable. People who live in the town and have nowhere else to park will be forced to apply for and pay for permits with all the nuisance and cost that entails."

"I will be urging the Borough Council when considering responses to their consultation, to heed the voices of nearly four and a half thousand people who have signed the petition as well as the Parish Council, the local traders and their organisations and the town's three Borough Councillors, whose unified response to the issue is quite clearly **'PLEASE DO NOT DO THIS!'**"



Cranbrook newsagent Linda Page receives Helen's signature

Add your signature to the petition

YOU CAN SIGN THE PETITION IN MOST CRANBROOK SHOPS IN STONE STREET AND IN THE HIGH STREET or write to Cllr Anne Marley, Cranbrook Parish Council, The Old Fire Station, Stone Street, Cranbrook, Kent, TN17 3HF



'In the Pen' with Lambert & Foster consultant John Butler and one of local farmer Les Stevens' prize winning pedigree Sussex Cattle, from his Boxted herd.

COUNTRYSIDE MATTERS

Helen Grant is keeping the agricultural needs and concerns of the Weald in the forefront of thinking of the next Conservative government.

The shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Wildlife, Richard Benyon, and the Leader of Kent County Council Paul Carter will be the key speakers at Helen's latest Business Forum Event on the morning of Tuesday 26th January 2010 at The Weald of Kent Hotel & Business Centre near Headcorn.

Helen said "The agricultural economy and our farming communities are a vital and natural part of this county, and our country's heritage and livelihood generally. For some time I have wanted to bring something tangible and political to

engage the rural business sector and I am delighted that we have such excellent speakers to head up the event. I am sure our farmers and agricultural business people will not hold back in the ensuing question and answer session".

Mrs Grant set up her business forum in January 2009 as a way for local business people to share ideas and opportunities, and to also create a clear communication channel between local firms, local government and the shadow cabinet. The initiative builds upon a business survey and two successful previous events run by Helen in 2009.

Put your views to the shadow DEFRA minister and the Leader of Kent County Council

ABOVE Richard Benyon's family runs the Englefield Estate which includes 3500 acres of woodland, 22 let farms, rural and urban housing and a Home Farm. Until his election as an MP in 2005, Richard ran the Home Farm which was mixed arable and dairy. In Westminster he is a member of the team that monitors the work of DEFRA and formulates Conservative policy in this area.

RIGHT Paul Carter Leader of Kent County Council



TAKING THE BULL BY THE HORNS

Maidstone's annual livestock show at the Detling Cattle Auction site had an unusual visitor this year.

Helen Grant dropped by to view the Champion cattle and to meet some of the farmers who breed them. At the ensuing prize-giving lunch at the Grangemoor Hotel, Helen said "Events like the Maidstone Fatstock Show are great showcases for our livestock farmers, where top breeders come together in healthy competition and also have a chance to talk about issues that matter in this important industry. I am delighted to have been invited and I am using the opportunity to learn more about the challenges our farmers are facing and to enjoy the results of their work breeding these superb animals and beasts."

HOLDING OUT FOR THE CENTRE

The need for Cranbrook to have a community centre has not gone away, even though the Co-op has said it won't give up land in the Regal car park for the purpose. Helen Grant, the town's prospective MP, says she's determined to find an alternative solution.

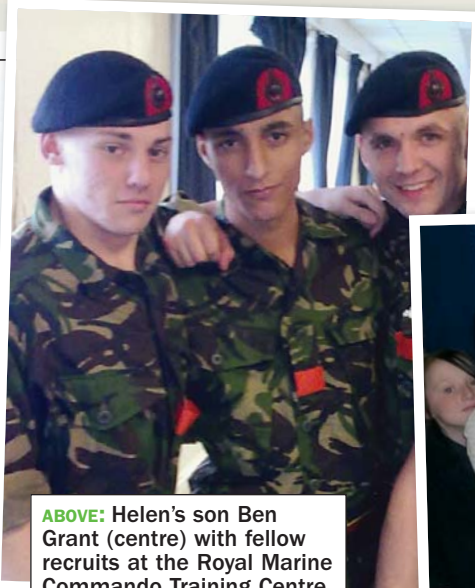
The hopes for a project next to the Co-op were ended when the company's national managers said they couldn't let the scheme go forward. But Helen says she's backing the Cranbrook Weald Centre Group, the Parish council and residents in the town, who won't give up the quest to replace the lost facilities when the former Tunbridge Wells council offices were closed.

Helen said. "Cranbrook is a vibrant and important town. We must fight to ensure its people get the community facilities that they need and deserve."



Helen - We need that Community Centre

PRESENT AND CORRECT



ABOVE: Helen's son Ben Grant (centre) with fellow recruits at the Royal Marine Commando Training Centre in Devon **RIGHT:** At Angley School with Ann Cook and some of the many students who have been wrapping parcels for our troops



Troopers' Mums, a support group, set up by Ann Cook of Cranbrook, for mums with sons and daughters serving with our armed forces overseas, has gained a new recruit.

Helen Grant, whose own son Ben is training to be a Royal Marine Commando, has been made an honorary member. "I am very proud to be asked to join and to wrap the 500th Christmas parcel that Ann has organised for the troops since 2007. It was for her own son, Gunner Jonathan Cook, serving in a forward base in Afghanistan." Helen said.

Troopers' Mums brings together the mothers of people serving, particularly in Afghanistan, who have constant worry about the well being and safe return of their loved ones.

"With my son Ben training to become a Marine I have some understanding of the tension these strong mums have to deal with. Proud but worried is a phrase that comes to mind."

Helen with Headteacher, Roger Kidney and some youthful challengers



ANN AND HELEN WORKING TOGETHER FOR MAIDSTONE & THE WEALD

They are two very different ladies, from two different generations, connected by one central challenge – representing the people of Maidstone and The Weald

One is about to wave farewell after 23 years of exemplary Parliamentary service, the other is seeking to take up the baton as the next MP, after 22 years as a family and community solicitor, mother and businesswoman.

As different as their backgrounds may appear, they have more in common than may meet the eye. Both have a fiery resolve to see justice done, both have been working to help the needy and vulnerable for much of their professional lives, and both share a strong Christian faith. Recently Ann invited Helen to share her constituency surgeries and they have both been attending various local events to promote charitable causes and open new facilities.

Ann commented "I have known Helen for two years now, since she was selected in January 2008. In that time she has shown a natural ability for this role and a very special empathy with the people that she meets. She is also an extremely hard working candidate and is already very well known across the constituency. I will look forward to campaigning with Helen when the election is called and wish her every success in the future."

Ann and Helen in Ann's surgery



POLITICAL CLASSES

You have to do your prep if you are a politician visiting Dulwich Preparatory School near Cranbrook. That's what Helen Grant found when she went to talk to the Year 8 pupils (aged 12-13) about life as a Conservative parliamentary candidate and politics in general.

"They gave me as good a grilling as any politician might get, whether from journalists or in Parliament," Helen said. "We covered everything from the recession to Europe and from MP's expenses to taxes. It was great to see everyone so involved. The idea that our young people are out of touch or alienated by politics is certainly a myth at Dulwich Prep School. I do look forward to going back for a second round."

Dulwich Headmaster, Roger Kidney, showed Helen around the 50 acre school attended by 520 children aged from three to 13.



Ann & Helen outside the Association Offices in Albion Place.

STAPLEHURST PASSENGERS GET A LIFT (OR TWO)

A new Step-Free access footbridge, connecting the station entrance to both platforms using two passenger elevators has been officially opened at Staplehurst station jointly by MP Ann Widdecombe and Prospective MP Helen Grant.

Miss Widdecombe said of the £2.8m project, "I'm delighted that these essential improvements are now open. It will make a real difference for passengers."

Helen added, "This development will help many of our older people, disabled people, mums with prams and buggies and travellers with heavy luggage. Staplehurst is an important station in this constituency, providing hundreds of passengers from Staplehurst and the rural surrounds with a key transport link into London, Ashford and Kent coast stations. I am delighted with the new facilities which make rail use easier, safer and more accessible for everyone".



Ann & Helen on the new 'step-free' footbridge with local residents L - R Jayne Aspinall, Trevelyan 'Trev' Cross and Darren Baxter



FARMERS QUESTION TIME IN MARDEN



Some of the attendees at the NFU meeting Front row L-R: Maidstone Borough Councillor John Verrall, Branch Chairman Will Day, Helen Grant, NFU Kent County Chairman Kevin Attwood, NFU Senior Group Secretary Mark Ensoll

A formidable group of local Kent farmers gathered together at the Marden Cricket & Hockey Club for the December meeting of the Maidstone & Staplehurst branch of the National Farmers' Union (NFU).

The mood in the room was not one of contentment as the agenda opened with a report from NFU Senior Group Secretary Mark Ensoll about the recent theft of two tractors.

After the meeting formalities had concluded the spotlight was then turned to the guest speaker for the evening –

Prospective MP Helen Grant, who delivered a talk about her background and about some of her hopes and aspirations for Britain under a Conservative government. Then the questions flowed from the floor as the throng sought Mrs Grant's personal views and opinions on an array of topics, both rural and national, including planning decisions, support for research & development, food security, the Hunting Act, Europe, itinerant workers, the strength of the supermarkets and more.

"It was clear that virtually everyone in the

room felt that the lot of our farmers had been largely ignored by the Labour government in favour of the environmental lobby. I am committed to becoming a voice for our rural community and I will work hard with them to help redress some of the imbalances that have developed over the years" she said after the hour long Q & A had ended.

The meeting wound up with much enthusiasm on display for Helen's forthcoming Rural Business Forum event with Shadow DEFRA minister Richard Benyon on 26 January 2010.

A Decade of Disrespect...

Rural England has suffered a decade of disrespect from Labour. Local services have been withdrawn and power has been taken away by a remote and arrogant government.

- ▶ 200 fewer rural schools than when Labour came to power
- ▶ 384 police stations closed in the shires in Labour's first two terms
- ▶ Dramatically widened funding gap between urban and rural areas
- ▶ 1,400 rural post offices lost since 2000



Special thanks to Sean Holden (one of our Borough Councillors for Benenden & Cranbrook) and my husband Simon for their kind assistance in the production of this edition of 'Maidstone & The Weald Matters.'

We need a Conservative agenda for

RURAL ACTION

www.conservativeruralaction.com

PROTECT rural services

- ▶ Realise the social value of vital rural services like post offices
- ▶ Give parents the power to stop rural schools closing and open new ones
- ▶ Allow rural public services to diversify
- ▶ Pilot new rural transport solutions

POWER to rural communities

- ▶ Return real power to individuals and communities
- ▶ Give villages the right to build their own affordable homes
- ▶ Scrap top-down housing targets
- ▶ Allow councils to oppose development planned for green belt land

RESPECT rural people

- ▶ Give rural communities a voice to decide their own future
- ▶ Respect the rural way of life
- ▶ Only regulate where self-regulation fails
- ▶ Ensure Ministers understand rural concerns through new rural advisory groups
- ▶ Fairer rural funding

REVIVE the rural economy

- ▶ Cut tax rates for small businesses to encourage growth and protect jobs
- ▶ Allow councils to offer rural business rate discounts
- ▶ Simplify the planning system to improve accountability
- ▶ Reduce the burden of regulation to give businesses more freedom



Prospective MP Helen Grant answers three of the questions she is often asked on the doorstep;

How do you feel about fitting into Ann Widdecombe's shoes?

I don't think anyone will ever step into her shoes. She is unique. What I will seek to emulate however, is the integrity of service that she has given, her strength of conviction, and her determination to speak out in accordance with her conscience. Maidstone & the Weald are very fond of their Ann, and I hope that I will be their Helen.

What led you into the world of politics?

I have always had strong, clear views about the issues that affect most of us as normal people, regardless of party politics. I think my biggest motivator is seeing that justice is done, and seen to be done. I also care deeply about the freedom of our business people to create wealth as well as strengthening our families and enabling social mobility. Around 6 years ago, in 2004, I decided learn more about party politics. At that time 'New Labour' were holding themselves out as the 'champions' of social justice and were reaching out to the business community. In order to have a closer look I became a party member for a few months. It was my first foray into party politics and I must say that it was a brief and politically alienating experience.

I was asked to apply to become a Councillor, but politely declined to send in an application. For the record I have never applied to be a candidate for Labour, nor have I stood for them in any capacity, and neither have I ever voted for the Labour Party.

When David Cameron became leader of the Conservative party in December 2005 I was inspired by his views on all of the issues close to my heart, re-engaging me with party politics, and I joined the Conservatives shortly after, in January 2006.

Where will you live and what attracts you about the constituency?

After months of searching, Simon and I have finally found our home in the constituency, in beautiful Marden. I am absolutely thrilled with the house and I am sure my boys and Charlie the dog will be very happy there.

I feel very much at home in Maidstone & the Weald. Maidstone is an historic County town not unlike my childhood home in Carlisle, another famous market town set amongst beautiful farmlands. The people are warm and genuine and I have made many friends during the two years I have been working here, both in town and in the rural communities.