

MAIDSTONE & THE WEALD MATTERS

SPRING 2011

from **Helen Grant MP**



POWER TO THE PEOPLE

WHAT THE LOCALISM BILL MEANS FOR MAIDSTONE & THE WEALD

The Localism Bill decentralises power and introduces reforms that will put the residents of our County Town and our rural Wealden neighbourhoods much more in charge of their own destinies.

The Bill gives more power to communities for the running of parks, post offices and pubs. It also creates the 'Community Right to Build', allowing residents to take control of planning in their neighbourhoods and giving them the freedom to build new homes and amenities in their areas.

Kent County Council and our Borough representatives will have a stronger financial stake in the local economy, helping them attract more entrepreneurs and businesses, and individuals will have a new right to veto excessive council tax rises, by way of referendum.

The Bill shifts power from Whitehall to the people whose lives are changed and influenced by such decisions.



Helen with her son Ben who is training to be a Royal Marine Commando

UPHOLDING THE MILITARY COVENANT

Helen Grant reports an upbeat message from the Coalition about the mutual obligations between the nation and our armed services; "We are absolutely committed to rebuilding the Covenant. Our Armed Forces make huge sacrifices for us, and in turn we will ensure we provide them with the support they need and deserve."

"We have already doubled the operational allowance and increased support to deal with mental health illnesses. In addition, we are legislating to make it a requirement that the Government report annually on its work to deliver the Covenant and we are considering a range of

further measures following the independent report of the Task Force on the military Covenant which was commissioned by this Government.

"This will set out how we are supporting our Armed Forces, their families and veterans in key areas such as healthcare, housing and education." Helen ended by saying. "I welcome this commitment made by the government but will continue to monitor their progress to ensure the covenant is maintained."

Helen Grant MP is Vice Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Armed Services (Army Division) and an honorary Member of the Regiment of Royal Engineers.



Helen Grant MP

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Dear Constituent

Much has happened since the election in May last year and 2011 is already proving no less busy, enjoyable and exciting than 2010. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many thousands of constituents who supported me at the general election and to assure everyone, regardless of political persuasion, that as your MP I am here to serve you all to the best of my ability. If you need my help in any way my contact details are on the back page so do, please, get in touch.

I hope you will find this news briefing an informative update on some of the many issues in which I am involved, both in the constituency and in Westminster. If you have internet access and would like more regular newsletters please go to my website and sign up for my e-communiqué.

The Coalition is making progress and I believe public confidence in the government is good. Much has been achieved over the last nine months, including doubling the number of academies, rebalancing the economy, commencing reforms in the NHS, and abolishing ID cards and Home Information Packs, all in the shadow of our country's largest budget deficit since World War II. Let us hope for a spring in the step of the economy as we get to grips with the austerity measures. I sincerely hope that 2011 will bring some much needed stability and renewed prosperity as growth starts to take hold and we shake off the onerous burden of debt.

HELEN GRANT

Member of Parliament for Maidstone & the Weald



Visit Helen's website at www.helengrant.com

FOCUS ON **Maidstone**

MATERNITY UPDATE

The decision, just before Christmas, to allow the closure of Maidstone's full maternity service has been seriously questioned.

The Maidstone Branch of the British Medical Association, Kent County Council's Health Committee and Helen Grant MP, have all written to seek a clarification as to the reasoning behind the decision. Letters were sent independently in January but no replies had been received at the time of going to press. Campaigners have until March to consider the merits of seeking a Judicial Review which could force the decision to be reconsidered.

Helen said, "The process to close the Maternity unit, which started under the last Labour government, is an example of top down decision making which fails to reflect the needs and desires of local people. I am continuing to fight the closure and I support the Government's new Health & Social Care Bill which I hope will improve the democratic accountability of the NHS."

HI-SPEED RAIL

Southeastern have announced the start of a new 50 minute High Speed service from Maidstone West to St Pancras International.

Starting on 22 May the service has three departures at 06.56, 07.26 and 07.56 and will return from St Pancras International at 17.14, 17.44 and 18.14, calling at Strood, Gravesend and Stratford International.

MP Helen Grant said "This is welcome news for Maidstone commuters. My fellow Kent MPs and I have made considerable efforts to gain something positive from Southeastern. Whilst St Pancras will not be the ideal destination for many, this is a good start. We will continue to press for a return of the much missed city service and other improvements."



Helen with girls from Invicta Grammar School raising money for Breast Cancer Research

ENGAGING WITH OUR SCHOOLS

Helen has visited many schools over the last 9 months, and many have visited her in Westminster too!

Mid-Kent College, Maidstone Grammar School for Girls, Yalding Primary School, Northborough School, Staplehurst School and Invicta Grammar Schools amongst several others. On one occasion she joined Tesco in presenting Five Acre School and Barming Primary School with a large box of sporting gear and teaching equipment. While on another Helen dressed in pink and joined Invicta Grammar School to raise funds for breast cancer research.



A frozen Helen dons a Maidstone shirt to the amusement of the Stones 1st team

BRING THE STONES HOME

Maidstone MP Helen Grant has given her full support to the "Bring The Stones Home" campaign at a recent meeting with Maidstone United FC team and board of Directors. The objective is to create a new £1.6 million stadium in the centre of Maidstone.

Helen said, "I am a very keen supporter of initiatives which bring

sport and the community together and these exciting proposals do just that. This will be the first football ground in the country to feature a 3G pitch. The advanced synthetic surface will allow high levels of use not only by the club's Ryman League Premier Division team, but also their 30+ community teams, other local clubs, businesses, community groups and schools".

For more information about the campaign visit www.maidstoneunited.co.uk



FOCUS ON

The Weald

COMMUNITY CENTRE update

Cranbrook community centre campaigners have reached a watershed moment with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council following the election of a new Council leader, Cllr Bob Atwood.

At a recent meeting, Mayor David Jukes told Cranbrook representatives that Cllr Atwood's new administration would be taking a new approach and exploring all options to provide new community facilities. Cranbrook lost its former amenities when the old council offices were vacated in

2008 and the town has battled for a replacement ever since.

Cranbrook MP Helen Grant said, "I have worked with our Parish, Borough and County Councillors and local campaigners since 2008 to get the TWBC to listen to the voice of Cranbrook. I must congratulate Cllrs Sean Holden and Linda Hall for leading the charge in Tunbridge Wells Town Hall. This is very good news for the community."

HELEN LANDS 'PLUM' ROLE

Maidstone & the Weald is a constituency dominated by fruit farming and related industries and local MP Helen Grant has made a mission of engaging with farmers since first coming to the seat in 2008.

In her latest move of support Helen recently accepted an invitation to become Secretary of the Parliamentary British Fruit Industry Group. "Our farmers have many unique issues to deal with and I am delighted to have the opportunity to do my part by helping to represent the industry at Westminster. Current projects include polytunnels and pesticides and I am looking forward to working on many other challenges faced by our farmers".



Helen with Marden farmer Ken Jenner at Great Sheephurst Farm, with his prize winning Rubens apples



Community Centre campaigners Cllr Linda Hall, Cllr Roger Manning, Helen Grant MP, former council office site occupier Alison Clarke, Cllr Sean Holden

WANT TO GET THE LATEST NEWS FROM HELEN?

Sign up to her regular e-mail newsletter for the latest news and views

www.helengrant.org/get-involved/newsletter-signup

WESTMINSTER DOG OF THE YEAR

Fighting off a cast of cross-party canine competition Charlie, Helen Grant's loveable 5 year old border terrier was judged to be Westminster Dog of the Year.

Organised by the Kennel Club and the Dogs' Trust, the annual competition, in its 18th year, was held at Westminster and judged by a panel of experts. MPs' dogs of all shapes, sizes and breeds were scrutinised on a variety of criteria. The judges also interviewed the owners extensively about their love of dogs and responsible ownership.

Helen said "Today was great fun but there is a very serious point behind this competition for me. Last year the Dogs' Trust rescued 16,000 dogs in this country, over 300 every week. 35% of those dogs were returned home thanks to a microchip which carries the details of their owner. I am proud to help promote this and the other great work the Dogs' Trust carries out, and of course I'm proud of Charlie for winning the competition".



Champion Charlie with Helen

WEALD OF KENT PLOUGHING MATCH

"The Weald of Kent Ploughing Match at Brissenden Farm, Frittenden, in September was the usual brilliant showcase of country life and was marvellous fun", says Helen.

"My thanks to the Chairman and President of the WKPMA and their wives for looking after us so kindly and I look forward to the 2011 event with anticipation".

More than 80 trade stands formed the heart of the show together with a gymkhana, a clay pigeon competition, farmers' market and a variety of other events. The 2011 event will be held at Pagehurst Farm, Staplehurst on 17th September 2011. For further information go to www.wkpma.co.uk



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Tanya & Adam Wise (Chairman), Tim Thatcher of AMC, Helen, Will (President) and Penny Thompson

For information about micro chipping your pet go to: www.dogstrust.org.uk/az/m/microchipping

THE BIG SOCIETY

Amidst the big debate about the Big Society, Helen Grant gives a personal view of what it is all about.

The many interpretations of this phrase are creating a wide and healthy debate and I applaud our Prime Minister for a vision which could have a profound and positive effect on the way we live in this country. I believe there is a need to shift away from polarised and insulated lifestyles, where neighbours are strangers, elders are ignored and kids are unchecked.

Communities can be so much greater than just a cluster of individuals. Collective local experience can go far in dealing with crime and unruly behaviour, poor landlords and bad planning decisions. People with a community mentality generate motivation to give a little more of their time, to help, nurture, care and protect. The Big Society is about building communities to take local control, help deal with common problems and build a mutual future. It is a way of thinking and a way of living that is the opposite of relying on the state.

GOVERNMENT HELPS CREATE THOUSANDS OF NEW APPRENTICESHIP PLACES

In a drive to create a new generation of skilled workers to drive economic growth the Government has increased the budget for Apprenticeships to over £1,400 million in 2011-12.

The overall shape of the policy is for apprentices to achieve equivalent esteem and status with university graduates. The Department of Education will work with the National Apprenticeship Service on plans for graduation ceremonies for apprentices and their families, an apprentice honour roll and the creation of alumni networks, mirroring those currently used by graduates.

Ministers have praised UK firms including British Gas, Superdrug, British Airways, BT, The Jaguar Group, Procter & Gamble, and Morrisons among many others for creating thousands of new apprenticeship places this year. The call is going out to more firms to follow the lead of these employers with the goal of business delivering 100,000 more apprentices by 2014.



Helen Grant

Member of Parliament for Maidstone & the Weald

Should you need to contact me about a constituency issue please call, email or write to Tony Williams my Constituency Assistant:



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CONSTITUENCY SURGERIES Maidstone The Weald

My fortnightly surgeries remain well attended and continue on Friday mornings at my office at 3 Albion Place, Maidstone. If you would like an appointment please telephone my Constituency Assistant, Tony Williams, on 01622 769898.

For the convenience of people from the Weald I have arranged for a new surgery service to be held in the Weald Information Centre below Cranbrook's Vestry Hall.

As in Maidstone this advice service is strictly by appointment and the 15 minute consultations can be booked by telephoning my Constituency Assistant, Tony Williams, on 01622 769898.

Weald surgeries are planned for the third Friday of each month and, if demand is high enough, we will seek to increase the length or frequency of the surgeries.

