

# Don't fight town, council leader told

■ Eleventh-hour meeting with community group

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MP HOPEFUL Helen Grant has accused a Tory council leader of choosing to "stand alone against a whole town" in a long-running community centre row.

Helen Grant, who hopes to pick up the Tory baton of Maidstone and the Weald MP Ann Widdecombe at the next general election, claims the people of Cranbrook have been "snubbed".

After a meeting with Tunbridge Wells council leader Cllr Roy Bullock she said: "The wishes of the people in Cranbrook are overwhelmingly clear. They want a community centre on the redundant council office site. Everyone knows that it makes sense, that it could be done."

"Everyone, that is, except the leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Cllr Roy Bullock."

She added: "I am calling on Cllr Bullock to hear the voice of the town, to do what is right and to find a way to get a community centre on the site."

"Until now, he has chosen to stand alone against the whole town. He has chosen to tell 6,000 people he knows what's best for them and has rejected the idea that they know what is best for their town."

She accused Cllr Bullock of snubbing the Weald Centre



■ Helen Grant in Cranbrook with KM bill revealing her support for the campaign; above right, Cllr Roy Bullock

Group (WCG) which is pushing for the office redevelopment and instead plugging the demolition of the library and the building of a small cen-

tre. She urged Cllr Bullock to work with the WCG and "do for the town what it wants you to do".

# Grant's dismay over threat to council offices

A POLITICAL storm is brewing over the future of former council offices being used to house community services, *writes Neill Barston.*

The offices, in Cranbrook High Street, are owned by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and have been used by services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, Help the Aged and education classes.

Now residents are anxious the building is to be demolished, fuelling fears the services will be thrown out.

Helen Grant, the Tory parliamentary hopeful for Maidstone and the Weald, voiced her "complete dismay" at the situation. She called on Tunbridge Wells council chiefs to resolve the issue promptly, citing a two-week ultimatum.

The latest twist in the saga has seen the Kumon Maths School, which teaches youngsters with learning disabilities, ejected from the site after 14 years as its lease expires.

Mrs Grant believes the CAB will be next in line.

Other organisations have already been forced to vacate the building. These include a history society, blind club and Help the Aged. The council insists it is actively considering community service provision. But Mrs Grant attacked the borough's perceived lack of action as the Cranbrook offices have been largely unused for more than 18 months.

She said: "There is strong support at every political level to address the town's demand for a proper replacement for the community facilities Tunbridge Wells council has taken from us. I met council leader Cllr Roy Bullock twice to seek progress, but in vain."

"Tunbridge Wells MP Greg Clarke then met me in Westminster to discuss the problem. He promised a further meeting with Cllr Bullock, myself and others to try to settle the matter. ...

# Council leader agrees to meet

By Emma Seymour

CALLS for a meeting to discuss the future of community facilities in Cranbrook were answered this week.

After repeated pleas from the Weald Centre Group to discuss its plans to redevelop the former council offices prior to Thursday's cabinet meeting, absolutely wonderful. If the meeting is to say they have met with us then it is a bit pointless. But I'm going with an open mind with the hope that at least they will listen to the people of Cranbrook."

Conservative prospective parliamentary candidate for Maidstone and Weald Helen Grant also made a last

appeal to Cllr Bullock "to hear the voice of the town". She said: "I profoundly hope that he will not merely go through the motions and that he will work with these committed citizens to restore community facilities that were lost when the offices were closed a year-and-a-half ago."

Reports on the council's preferred plan to redevelop the library into a town hub and WCG's proposal will be presented at Thursday's meeting, when a decision on the way forward is expected.

Mrs Grant added: "Cllr Bullock has championed a ridiculous proposal to rebuild the library, which will include a token function room. This is despite rejection of the idea by more than 95 per cent of the town's people."

"There is a chance here to show that TWBC is going to take notice of what people say they want and need."

The results of a feasibility study of the library site carried out by TWBC, Kent County Council and architects Hazel McCormack and costing £5,000, are also expected at the cabinet meeting.

Cllr Bullock said Monday's meeting "will be a free and frank discussion on the progress that the Weald Centre Group has made in response to the questions that were asked by (consultants) Baker Tilly regarding the Weald Centre Group's business plan".

## Letter from Helen Grant to Kent On Sunday

### Council should listen

The wishes of the people in Cranbrook are overwhelmingly clear. They want a community centre on the redundant council office site.

I hear that from everyone in the town to whom I speak. Everyone knows that is the case; that it makes sense; that it could be done. Everyone, that is, except the leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Cllr Roy Bullock. Well, I am calling on Cllr Bullock to hear the voice of the town, to do what is right and to find a way to get a proper community centre on the site.

Unfortunately, up until now, Cllr Bullock has chosen to stand alone against a whole town. He has chosen to tell 6,000 people he knows what's best for them and has blatantly rejected the idea they know what's best for their town. For 18 months he has snubbed, until now, the group of Cranbrook citizens known as the Weald Centre Group, which seeks to restore community facilities to the council office site. Instead, Cllr Bullock has championed a ridiculous proposal to rebuild the library, which will include a token function room. This is despite a rejection of the

idea by more than 95 per cent of the town's people and its dubious suitability in terms of location and parking.

I met Cllr Bullock last week and at that meeting he told me he would now meet the Weald Centre Group for the first time. I profoundly hope he will not merely go through the motions and that he will work with these committed citizens to restore community facilities that were lost when the offices were closed a year and a half ago.

There is a chance here to show that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is going to take notice of what people say they want and need, as indeed they made clear during the council's own £24,000 consultation process. There is a chance to show Tunbridge Wells is not a remote authority and a chance to change the overwhelming perception it neither knows nor cares what Cranbrook, 16 miles away, actually wants.

I therefore call upon Cllr Bullock to take up this chance when the matter comes before the cabinet meeting (no cabinet members are local to the Cranbrook area) on October 2.

I say listen and make it happen. Work with the Weald Centre Group volunteers and do for the town what it wants you to do. They will have an open mind about the best way forward if you do. Don't let Cranbrook down.

Helen Grant

Conservative Prospective parliamentary candidate, Maidstone and the Weald

## MP to run competition

A COMPETITION to give young people the chance to experience life as a politician has been launched.

Prospective parliamentary candidate for Maidstone and Weald, Helen Grant is looking for 16 to 18-year-olds to shadow her until the next general election.

The two winners will visit Parliament, attend meetings, help to organise fundraising events and learn how to prepare and deliver speeches. Candidates will need to present a CV, have an interview, give a speech and undertake a short question and answer session, to be in with a chance.

If you are interested contact Mrs Grant at [helengrant@helengrant.org](mailto:helengrant@helengrant.org) or call 07703 202002 by September 26.

## Students to join in the campaign trail

BY NICK AMES

TWO school students have won a competition to shadow a Conservative parliamentary candidate in the run-up to the next General Election.

Blaise Matthews, 16, from Maidstone Grammar School, and Sophie Jones, 17, of Cranbrook School, will get a unique insight into Helen Grant's campaign to succeed the retiring Ann Widdecombe as Maidstone and the Weald MP.

Mrs Grant, who runs a successful law firm, set up the competition to show young people there is more to politics than often thought.

She said: "Everyone on the selection panel was stunned by the qualities of all five finalists. They had to write and deliver a speech, answer political questions and engage in debate.

"They were all first class and I'm sure they'll go far in whatever career paths they choose.

"Each candidate had something unique to offer and because they were all so good I've invited the other three to join my election campaign team, to experience the journey and to bring in their own special areas of expertise."

Mrs Grant phoned the winners to tell them the good news and asked: "What do you think you, as a young person, can bring to politics?"

Blaise said: "Enthusiasm, optimism, fairness and open-mindedness. I feel extremely excited and I can't wait to start working with someone who I completely believe in."

"I'd love to be a politician myself in the future. I feel very passionate about politics and I want to fight for justice."



FROM LEFT: Competition winners Sophie Jones and Blaise Matthews with parliamentary candidate Helen Grant

Meanwhile Sophie said: "I don't yet know if I want to be a politician myself, but I do know that I want to play a big part in bringing about change.

"Young people can bring fresh ideas and they are able to relate, often very well, to people who haven't been politically engaged before."

The two winners will visit The House of

Commons and other Government buildings, meet councillors, ministers and shadow ministers, learn about fund-raising, doorstep campaigning, and writing and giving speeches. The runners up were: Matt Baker, 16, of Oakwood Park Grammar School, Henry Comet, 17, of Cranbrook School and Kimberley Peake, 16, of Maidstone Grammar School for Girls.

## Question time for prospective MP



Helen Grant with head teacher Roger Kidney and pupils Evie Davis, Millie Gurr, Edward Davison and Josh Chalmers at Dulwich Preparatory School, Cranbrook

Picture: Matthew Walker PD1641503

SHE could face questions in the House of Commons one day, but in the meantime prospective parliamentary candidate Helen Grant faced some tough questioning from school pupils.

Year 8 pupils at Dulwich

Preparatory School in Coursehorn Road, Cranbrook, had a question and answer session with the Conservative candidate for Maidstone and the Weald on Thursday, November 5. It was the second high profile

visit for the school in a week.

On Tuesday, November 3, former Bishop of Dover Richard Llewellyn visited to bless the new hall for youngsters in Little Stream and was treated to a play about St Augustine.

Conservatives

## ARE YOU FEELING THE CRUNCH?

Debt & insolvency  
Family breakdown  
Employment threats  
Welfare Benefits issues

## HELEN CAN HELP

Free practical advice & guidance for the people of Maidstone & The Weald



## Helen Can Help with debt

HELP is at hand for people in the Weald in need of advice and guidance on how to deal with the pressures of the credit crunch.

Conservative Parliamentary candidate Helen Grant is using her 20 years experience as a family and community solicitor to offer free surgeries to those living in the Maidstone and Weald constituency.

She said: "So many people are now facing serious debt problems, often as a result of unemployment due to the falling economy. This in

turn can have disastrous effects on the whole family unit. I have spent most of my professional life helping with these kinds of problem."

Helen Can Help surgeries are available by appointment only, taking place on Thursday afternoons at the Conservative Association of offices in Maidstone.

To book an appointment call 01622 752463 on Tuesdays to Thursdays from 10am to 3pm. More information is available from [www.helengrant.org/HelenCanHelp](http://www.helengrant.org/HelenCanHelp)

## Farming at centre of rural business forum

SHADOW environment minister Richard Benyon hopes to see a golden age for Kent farmers during the next few years.

Mr Benyon told 150 people at a rural business seminar in Headcorn that the government had not given enough respect to the rural community.

"I want to see a golden age for farming," he said. "I don't think there will be a more important time for farmers since the 1940s because you will be producing food which is an honourable thing to do, something to be proud of and which has not been given the respect it deserves for far too long."

Mr Benyon was speaking at the Maidstone and The Weald Rural Business Forum, held at the Weald of Kent Hotel, Headcorn.

The event was the third business forum organised by Helen Grant, prospective Tory candidate for Maidstone and the Weald.

She said: "By 2050, the world's population will be around six billion. We need to feed ourselves and farming is going to be essential. We have to look after our farmers."

Mrs Grant emphasised the importance of supporting rural businesses, efficient rural transport and affordable housing.



Richard Benyon addresses the Maidstone and The Weald Rural Business Forum

## MP candidate praises staff after hospital visit

WEALD parliamentary candidate Helen Grant praised the work of staff at Benenden Hospital during a fact finding visit.

Mrs Grant, who aims to succeed Maidstone and Weald MP Ann Widdecombe, had a tour of the surgical theatres and the paediatric wards and was able to speak to staff about the challenges they face.

She said: "Benenden Hospital is an outstanding establishment in an idyllic location containing state of the art facilities and run by a very warm team of highly-skilled professionals."

"Their business model augments and supports the NHS service rather than competing with it, and shows a successful way ahead for the future of hospital services in this country."

# Pupils wrap special gifts for the troops

From page 1

in Iraq. Although the Ministry of Defence has asked people not to send unsolicited Christmas gifts to serving troops, Mrs Cook's campaign, Operation Yuletide, sends only to named soldiers, and sends them what they have asked for.

On Tuesday, Mrs Cook was on hand to see pupils wrap specific gifts for the soldiers, along with the Conservative prospective parliamentary candidate for Maidstone and the Weald, Helen Grant, who wrapped the 500th parcel.

Pupils also decided to write letters to the soldiers, which they included in their parcels.

Mrs Cook said: "This has been soldier-driven. They tell me what they want us to send, and how to pack it, so that there is no extra packaging."



Prospective parliamentary candidate for Maidstone and the Weald Helen Grant (Con) helps Angley School pupils and Ann Cook pack the 500th box for troops in Afghanistan PD16/49259

## Possible hike in business rates is 'kick in the teeth'

NEWS The Government could further increase business rates is "deeply concerning", says prospective parliamentary candidate Helen Grant.

The NEC for Maidstone and the Weald said the Government's new Business Rates Supplements Bill will force town halls to increase rates on local firms by levying a supplementary rate on top of current bills.

She said: "I fear the supple-

mentary business rates will be yet another backdoor way for Gordon Brown to hike taxes by stealth at a time when our firms are struggling for their survival."

"My recent business survey indicates a large majority of businesses do not feel this Government understands the needs of the business community."

"This kick in the teeth from Labour just confirms their perception."

# Forum to state case for farming's future

FARMERS and the rural community will have an opportunity to state their case for the future of the countryside to a powerful line-up of decision-makers, writes **Mike Bennett**.

Shadow agriculture minister Richard Benyon MP, Hadlow College director of resources Mark Lumsden Taylor, and Kent County Council leader Cllr Paul Carter will outline their vision on the future of farming at a public meeting of the Weald Business Forum this month.

Mr Lumsden Taylor has been passionate about the industry and the promotion of UK-produced food during his seven years at Hadlow College. He is a board member of the Kent County Agricultural Society and the Rural Innovation Unit.

His mission is to educate people about the opportunities available in the rural industries and dispel the perception that farming has little to offer, especially after many years of massive food imports from nations with lower production costs.

He said: "Now we are seeing a reversal of the industry's fortunes. Concerns about future food security aligned to burgeoning population and climate change issues are resulting in greater public interest in where



COUNTRY WAYS: The Garden of England will benefit from agriculture's revival and how food is produced."

He believes farming is in line to return to its former position as one of the most important industries and there is the need for bright, motivated people to take up the challenge.

"We don't have a choice - we have to produce more food," he said. "This is an exciting, rewarding, stimulating and challenging time for a career in agriculture."

"Demand for local, regional and UK produced food is growing on a daily basis."

The forum will be hosted by prospective parliamentary candidate Helen Grant, who will be contesting retiring MP Ann Widdecombe's Maidstone and the Weald seat at the general election this year.

She said: "The agricultural economy and our farming communities are a vital and natural part of this county. I want to bring something tangible to engage the rural business sector and am delighted we have such excellent speakers to head the event. I am sure people will not hold back in the question and answer session."

Brought up in a farming family in Cumbria, Ms Grant retains strong links with the land.

She said: "Country life is close to my heart and I feel an affinity with farmers and the rural aspects of this constituency."

Shadow minister Mr Benyon's family runs a 3,500 acre estate in Berkshire and he is a member of the Conservative team that formulates rural policy.

The meeting will be at the Weald of Kent Golf Hotel, Headcorn, starting at 9.30am on Tuesday, January 26. To book a place, contact [elaine@nowwireless.com](mailto:elaine@nowwireless.com) or write to Helen Grant's Rural Business Forum, c/o Gail Jessel, Little Pagehurst Oast, Pagehurst Road, Staplehurst, TN12 0JD.

# Council urged to speed up new village school

EMMA SEYMOUR  
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THE ECONOMIC downturn has been blamed for the delay in the development of a new school in Benenden.

Conservative candidate Helen Grant called on Kent County Council this week to set a date for the re-building of Benenden Primary school, which is currently split across six separate sites in the village.

Part of the Glebe Field was chosen as the most suitable site for the new building in April, but no details of when work is due to begin have been announced.

"It would be a marvellous 400th birthday present for the people of Benenden if Kent County Council would announce a firm timetable for this development so that all of the detailed preparatory work could begin urgently."

Mrs Grant met with KCC cabinet member of education operation, resources and skills Mark Dance on Wednesday to discuss the issue.

He said: "KCC has made a decision as to which site in Benenden it considers is more suitable for the replacement school buildings."

Helen and Cranbrook protesters at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall on 21st October 2008



Kent Messenger © 2008



**BLOOMING SUCCESS:** Helen Grant, left, assures Evelyn Fishenden, right, that the memorial garden will live on

## I can promise you your rose garden

A PENSIONER received an early Christmas present when the future of a garden she founded in the county town to remember lost loved ones was guaranteed.

Following action by Conservative parliamentary candidate Helen Grant and Maidstone council, a six year campaign to restore the Memorial Rose Garden, located on the Millennium Walk near Locksmeadow, has finally been a success.

Evelyn Fishenden, 81, from Cranbrook, founded the open space by paying £20 to plant two rose bushes in 2000 in memory of her son Nigel, 43, who died in 1999 and her grandson Tom, 18, who was killed in a car accident in 1996.

But the plants did not flower properly, which upset Mrs Fishenden every time she visited the garden to remember her loved ones.

Mrs Grant spoke on Mrs Fishenden's behalf with David Petford, chief executive of Maidstone council, and received an assurance that an alternative site along the River Park will be found by January or February, and plaques for loved ones installed.

## HELEN NEEDS YOUR HELP

Please help Helen and the Conservatives to win

- I will be voting for Helen Grant and the Conservatives
- I would like a postal vote
- I am willing to deliver a few leaflets in my area
- I can display a poster
- I would like to make a donation or send in a few stamps

### YOUR DETAILS

Name	<input type="text"/>
Address	<input type="text"/>
Postcode	<input type="text"/>
E-Mail	<input type="text"/>
Tel/Mobile	<input type="text"/>

PLEASE POST BACK TO:

**Maidstone & The Weald Conservative Association,  
3 Albion Place, Maidstone, Kent ME14 5DY**

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