

Leader's Statement to Full Council – Wednesday 14 November 2018

WW1 Commemorations in Swale

In 2013, the Council established a WW1 Steering Group comprising Members, Officers and community representatives from the education and heritage sectors. This group oversaw an extensive programme of work which has encouraged community involvement and given valuable support to the voluntary sector as well as commemorating the 1914-1918 centenary. The work of the WW1 Steering Group is now concluded, and I extend my personal thanks, not only to members of that group that worked tirelessly throughout, but also to the numerous individuals and communities that supported this commemorative period.

The Centenary of WW1 has provided an opportunity for us to come and work together and to share some important stories with a local flavour. Some of these stories – Breaking the Myths: First World War and Africa – have never been told before. Our knowledge and understanding of what WW1 means to all of us has been stretched.

Nowhere can the impact of WW1 be more keenly felt and understood than in our long and fruitful relationship with Ypres in Belgium; where the scars of human conflict can still be seen, and the stories of sacrifice etched on those graves of the many war cemeteries so lovingly cared for by The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, remind us of their sacrifice. Our special relationship with Ypres; serves as a constant reminder of the perils of war. As a legacy, the Council has become a Life Member of The Last Post Association. The Last Post has been sounded every evening under the Menin Gate Memorial in Ypres since 1 July 1928, and we pray that will continue for years to come.

The Council has to date awarded £62,750.86 in WW1 grants to 115 applicants with a total project value of almost £500,000. Highlights across the Borough have included three Victoria Cross services of remembrance, developing a series of lectures delivered Borough-wide, commemorative seating in Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheerness, initiated a Plant a Real Poppy campaign (100 community planting schemes in the Centenary), an annual civic Journey of Commemoration with all nine secondary schools, research projects and civic services of dedication and remembrance. The Council undertook the first of these special services in August 2014 at St. Michael's Church in Sittingbourne where the focus was on a commemorative Stained-Glass Window and we concluded with a special service last month at the Sittingbourne War Memorial.

This final commemorative activity on Sunday 28 October – to mark the dedication of our WW1 Centenary Memorial Stone - serves as a reminder to our communities of the war and its global reach. The stone makes a clear and permanent statement

that 'the people of Swale wish to commemorate the Men, Women and Children of every race, creed, colour or religion who gave their lives or suffered as a result of war. They gave their tomorrow for our today and we will remember them'.

On Saturday 3 November, the anniversary of the consecration of the existing memorial cross, a public dedication of the Faversham Memorial Gardens acknowledged the sacrifices of the past, helped the present generation reflect on those freedoms hard won; and provides future generations with a garden that gives space for reflection. It is estimated that there are some 1500 Faversham residents who are relatives of those killed or died of their injuries.

Faversham was one of the very few towns and villages that did not publicly display the names of servicemen killed in both World Wars and other conflicts. The project to include the names of the 374 servicemen killed in WW1 and the 177 killed in WW2 started in 2009 with the ambitious aim to ensure that this was achieved by 2018, the end of the centenary commemorative events for the First World War.

As well as creating 8 tablets with 551 names carved in stone, the garden has been renewed as an "English country garden" with new gates, a disability friendly pathway and six benches set out amongst shrubs, flowers and a lawn. A great deal of complex and detailed work has been undertaken and support was given from across Faversham and beyond by individuals, organisations and companies that recognise the sacrifice made. I know the Memorial Garden Committee greatly appreciate the generous help and support they have been given.

The Council is both pleased and proud to have been part of making new history throughout this Commemorative period and highlights from the commemorative period can be seen in the forthcoming edition of Inside Swale which has a commemorative feature.

Sittingbourne Town Centre regeneration project update

This week, with the opening of Dover Street, marks the completion of a key stage of the second phase of Spirit of Sittingbourne roadworks. This means the disruption outside of the train station will be minimised and traffic flow in Sittingbourne town centre will also improve. Station Street is now permanently closed off at the northern end to vehicle traffic and works will continue to complete the station frontage paving and the main bus stop/stand area.

We have issued a map to illustrate the new route as we are aware that the changes to the A2 are causing some confusion. This is to be expected at the start of any major rerouting. This can be found on the website and is also in the Autumn edition of Inside Swale.

I know that the town centre roadworks have caused disruption for many and I appreciate your understanding in bearing with us as we make the necessary changes that pave way the way for our new exciting new leisure quarter. To this end, PDR started on site on Tuesday 23 October. They have currently installed their site offices and welfare units and have operatives on site installing the timber posts and hoarding. We look forward to working with them to deliver the leisure scheme for Sittingbourne which will bring the Light Cinema, Travelodge and restaurants.

In 2018 PDR celebrated its 25th anniversary having firmly established itself as one of the largest independent construction resources working throughout the United Kingdom. PDR have now built out projects in excess of £0.6 billion working in the residential, retail, motor retail, health & education, industrial, office and hotel and leisure sectors.

The MSCP continues to build out at pace and still on track to open in February 2019. The concrete for the decks will be poured onto each of the floors during November and the installation of the external façade panels will commence at the beginning of December.

Swale's Community Housing Fund Programme

I am pleased to announce SBC's new partnership with Action for Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) to enable the delivery of a community led affordable housing programme in Swale. To kick start this initiative £60k is being invested in a one year pilot programme, providing a dedicated officer to deliver Swale's programme whilst forming local community housing groups with promotions and marketing delivered in partnership with Swale BC. This will then inform how we utilise the further £240k Community Housing Fund to make a real difference in Swale.

Action for Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) are a specialist enabling organisation with substantial expertise of working with local community housing groups delivering small affordable housing schemes across Kent and Swale.

White Ribbon day of action

After two years of hard work, our Community Safety Partnership has been named the first official White Ribbon Borough in the UK – a marker of our commitment to tackling domestic violence. The White Ribbon campaign engages men in an effort to end male violence against women. By wearing a white ribbon, men promise to never commit, condone or remain silent about such violence. Swale currently has 8 ambassadors representing various organisations and spreading the White Ribbon message amongst our community.

We're working with local sports clubs to help them to achieve White Ribbon status as they are in an ideal position to promote healthy masculinity and the purpose of the campaign amongst players, club members and spectators. Four clubs and organisations have successfully become accredited so far. We're also working closely with Standford Hill and Elmley Prison to encourage the endorsement of the White Ribbon principles throughout the service, as well as pushing the campaign out to local businesses.

The 25 November marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls and various activities have been planned which aim to raise public awareness and reinforce the commitment to a borough free from violence. Events planned include an Anne Frank Prison Exhibition at Standford Hill which is a project that tackles prejudice and discrimination and encourages more positive behaviour; a borough wide 'Wear a White Ribbon Event'; and the official launch of a promotional video featuring our local ambassadors.

Cllr Andrew Bowles
Leader