

## **Leader's Statement to Full Council – Wednesday 20 February 2019**

### **Access to GPs in Swale**

I am sure all members are aware of the recent national attention that Kent and in particular Swale CCG received in relation to access to GP's. Although it is a national problem it was very stark to see the number of patients per GP for our residents. I had the opportunity to raise our concerns at the KCC Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> January with the Kent and Medway Sustainability and Transformation Partnership and more locally directly with Swale CCG. Although both the STP and Swale CCG have provided reassurances that standards are rising across GP Services with 17 practices rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and that the wider general practice workforce is available through the introduction of multi-disciplinary teams and care navigators and bolstered by the use of regular locums, we still need to ensure that we have a long-term solution.

The development of the Kent and Medway Medical School is one such solution and I look forward to the opening in 2020 and the first graduates in 2025. In the meantime, we need to attract good quality GP's to our area and encourage the CCG's to work creatively with developers to maximise the S.106 opportunities to ensure that we have first class facilities for the workforce to operate out of.

### **Housing Infrastructure Fund bid**

Officers continue to work with Kent County Council on the full business case for the improvements to the Key Street and Grovehurst junctions along the A249. The £40m scheme is one of 44 around the country that were shortlisted by Government to proceed to the final, competitive stage of the Forward Funding element of the Housing Infrastructure Fund. The final bid will be submitted in March of this year, and it is hoped that announcements will follow in the summer.

If successful this funding will not replace developer contributions, but will give certainty by ensuring the full funding package for delivery will be in place, up front. In turn, it will also provide the opportunity for developer contributions received to be recycled to address other highways issues.

### **Handyman Scheme**

One service I am very proud that we offer as a borough council is our Home Improvement Agency service. This vital service ensures our elderly residents are able to live safely, securely and independently in their own homes. The handyman scheme alone has helped 427 residents between April and Dec 2018. The vital work that takes place maybe only small in some cases but it often prevents falls or ensures that residents get the right support and don't end up injured or in hospital. Often when the team visit they identify other work that needs to be done and this service ensures our residents stay in their homes for longer. This is an excellent use of the better care fund and I am sure you along with me will applaud the great work of the team.

### **Sittingbourne Town Centre**

You will see a lot of activity by the station and down the A2. Highways work are in the main complete and work on the leisure site which will provide hundreds of new jobs and brand new retail offerings, including Nandos, Pizza Express and The Light Cinema, has started. Foundations to the hotel are complete and steel erection is underway. Foundations to the Cinema are substantially complete and steel erection will commence shortly.

Cladding has started on the MSCP, giving it a dramatic look in its oyster white shell, with colours reflecting through the openings from each floor. We anticipate this to be open to the public by April 2019.

We also welcome a new owner of the Forum Shopping Centre – Praxis. They are investing over £2m into the facility which demonstrates Sittingbourne is a place of potential - enabled by our regeneration plans.

### **DCN Conference**

I recently attended the DCN Annual Conference. Over 200 delegates representing the majority of councils in membership with perhaps surprisingly more Chief Executive than Leaders present. Highlights included the following speakers:

- **Secretary of State, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP** – who spoke about the challenges and future landscape of local government, including candidly answering questions on planning, housing, HIF, Brexit and other current matters
- **Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Rt Hon Liz Truss MP** who set out her highly localist approach to the spending review that placed devolution of finances at the heart of the review whilst maintaining a commitment to incentivise councils ‘who have skin in the game’ to build more homes
- **Shadow Secretary of State, Andrew Gwynne MP** who acknowledged districts as “the lifeblood of communities” and one of the most efficient parts of the public sector, and said that powers taken back from Brussels after Brexit should go to town halls instead of Whitehall
- **Minister for Local Government finance, Rishi Sunak MP** who spoke in detail about future funding and took questions on a variety of detailed issues including tier splits
- **Bill Grimsey, Author of the Grimsey Review and regeneration expert** who spoke on the future of our high street in an inspirational talk against the backdrop of the £675m high street fund, and
- **Tom Walker from Homes England**, who gave an update of the HIF process and how Homes England can support districts.

**Cllr Andrew Bowles**  
**Council Leader**