

**Leader's Statement to Full Council – Wednesday 26 November 2014**

**Regeneration update**

I have to start this month with potentially the most exciting news for Swale since the confirmation of the construction of the second Swale crossing. I refer of course to the receipt by the Borough Council of the planning application for Phase 1 of the Spirit of Sittingbourne consortium's regeneration of Sittingbourne Town Centre.

Whilst this application will of course have to go through the full and formal scrutiny of the Planning process, one cannot overestimate its regenerative potential. A seven screen multiplex cinema, around about eight new restaurants, and new homes and other retail outlets should lead to an increased footfall in our Town Centre of circa 400,000 visitors a year. As these plans move forward, the positive effect of this on existing businesses and local communities cannot be overstated.

**Health update**

The Swale Health and Wellbeing Board Meeting took place on Wednesday 19 November, with an Agenda focussed mainly on mental health issues. The priorities for the Board to focus on were agreed as:

- improving child and maternal health;
- reducing health inequalities;
- supporting people with mental health issues, including dementia, to live well; and
- reducing the impact of housing on health inequalities.

On the same day the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board took place, where the annual report on Kent's Safeguarding Board showed some improvement, but with some areas of performance remaining causes for concern, such as the number of children placed in Kent by other authorities. If anyone would like further details the full report is available on the Kent website.

Capping on care costs have been announced for people of State Pension age and over - the cap will be £72,000, with no further charge on personal finances. Also there will be a lower cap for people with established care needs who have turned 18. People in care homes will still be responsible for living costs if they can afford to pay them, up to a maximum of £12,000 per annum, but because this will be means-tested most will pay significantly less.

People will receive help with their care home costs if their total assets, including the value of their home, is less than £118,000, a significant uplift compared with the current limit of £23,250. Although this could have a potential negative impact on Kent County Council's finances, it will be beneficial for many residents.

As Cllr Ken Pugh was away on holiday, Cllr John Wright, the Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing, supported me at both meetings. However, I was disappointed to note that, despite further reminders, no other Members from Swale chose to attend these public meetings. All meetings for next year have been set and should be in Members' diaries and I would urge Members to attend and contribute as they are able to this area of significant importance and interest to our local communities.

### **Dedication of WW1 Centenary VC Stone**

Residents, local organisations, VIPs, and civic dignitaries joined with Mrs. Susan Bavin and her family to commemorate the life of her late father Donald Dean VC, and reflect upon his heroic actions on the battlefield during WW1. A specially commissioned stone presented to the Council by central government has been permanently set within the area of the War Memorial in Sittingbourne, and was dedicated on the afternoon of Remembrance Sunday.

The citation for the VC was read by his grandson, David Bavin, with generations of the family coming together for the first time in many years to remember this remarkable man. Many residents took the opportunity to recall, with the family, their encounters with Donald Dean throughout his life in the Town.

### **Armistice Day – Journey of Commemoration:**

The Mayor and Mayoress led a delegation of young school ambassadors from all of our secondary schools (this year we were also pleased to welcome representatives of Meadowfield's sixth form) to our Twin Town of Ypres in Belgium for the Armistice commemorations.

Joining the Poppy Parade from the civic square in Ypres and onto the Menin Gate for the Act of Remembrance, representatives of Swale's young people spoke of the impact this had upon them, such as: "It was amazing and a once-in-a-lifetime experience"; "It was very eye opening and worth getting up early for"; and "The bands and soldiers were amazing and this was such an honourable experience".

Supported by a battlefields guide the delegation moved on to three cemeteries in the afternoon and heard of the experiences of some of Sittingbourne's young soldiers who paid the highest price with their lives. The sentiment of many attendees was captured by two of our young ambassadors who said that: "It was nice hearing stories at the different cemeteries about the soldiers and their experience: and: "It was an excellent experience which really opened up my mind about the events that happened".

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