

## **Leader's Statement to Full Council – Wednesday 13 December 2017**

### **Health Service update**

There are currently two proposals to reconfigure acute services in East Kent. One proposal is to significantly downgrade the services offered at Kent and Canterbury Hospital in favour of providing those acute services at Ashford and or Margate. The second option is the proposal to build a new 'super hospital' in Canterbury. This is reliant on a developer (Quinn Estates) gifting the land and constructing the shell of the hospital free of charge as part of a larger proposal including circa 2,000 residential units. The construction of such a facility at Canterbury would almost certainly include significantly downgrading the services currently offered at both Margate and Ashford.

I believe this re-organisation to be both premature and misguided. For decades the health authorities, in various guises, have promoted moving service delivery closer to the patient. Indeed when I accepted some years ago now the invitation from the Secretary of State to become a Non-Executive Director of the then Canterbury and Coastal Primary Care Trust, one of my 'lines in the sand' was that the trust would support and maintain the 'cottage' hospitals at Faversham, Whitstable and Herne Bay. Health professionals are often heard to quote the example of the Estuary View facility in Whitstable as a model for future service delivery. Estuary View provides on-site x-ray facilities, many operations more traditionally carried out at major hospitals can be accommodated here at present with the desire to widen this by the provision of overnight stay accommodation. This is all very well and good but the majority of communities do not currently have such a facility. Surely, we should be funding, building and staffing facilities such as this in all our towns before embarking on the reduction in the number of accident and emergency units. I believe that the health service is putting the 'cart before the horse'. If they continue down their current preferred course of action they will be forcing a large percentage of the most acutely sick to undertake long and uncomfortable journeys. We well know that contact with family and friends plays an important part in recovery, the proposal to reduce the acute hospitals will result in many relatives and other visitors being faced with the necessity of undertaking long and complicated journeys to visit. Indeed for those reliant on public transport it may prove totally impractical for them to visit their loved ones whilst they are hospitalised.

This report refers to services in East Kent. The proposals here are most advanced. I am well aware that similar discussions are being held in West Kent which will involve the rest of the Borough's residents although I understand that these discussions lag approximately 9 months behind the East Kent proposals. I am sure we will return to discussions of health services in West Kent in the appropriate time span.

## **Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme update**

It's with pleasure that I can say that on 30 November we went unconditional on the leisure site. This means that Spirit are signed up to a fixed price to develop the leisure scheme. This is a real step forward.

Meanwhile, the big box retail continues to move on a pace and you will see the progress that is being made. Completion still expected for March 2018 and then tenants will fit out with openings ready for the summer. After running a naming competition (members asked via despatch, in the newspaper and on social media) the votes are in and I am delighted to announce that the name of our new retail site is ....Princes Street Retail Park!

Now start thinking of names for the leisure site as this will also need to be named in due course ....

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