**Parish Update – Easter 2022**

**Faversham**

**Ukraine conflict affects us all**

Since my last newsletter, we’ve seen the shocking scenes of Russian tanks rolling into Ukraine and siege tactics being used in cities like Mariupol and elsewhere.

I continue to think about the people caught up in this horrific situation – the mothers with children trying to protect them from bombs, the women MPs now carrying guns. Their courage is extraordinary.

I’m proud that the UK is leading efforts to isolate Russia as well as providing aid and weapons to Ukraine. We’re also supporting people fleeing the conflict with over 200,000 people and organisations signed up to our Homes for Ukraine scheme.

People in Faversham and Mid Kent have been doing their bit to help, with local collection points inundated and many generous donations to the DEC Ukraine Appeal, which raised over £100 million in its first four days.

The conflict in Ukraine is also having an impact at home. We’re seeing this most clearly in the cost of energy with surging heating bills and eyewatering prices at the pumps.

The Chancellor’s Spring Statement contained some very welcome news – including cutting National Insurance for 70% of households and a cut in fuel duty. It also doubled the Household Support Fund to £1 billion, with Kent County Council getting an extra £11 million to support families most in need.

As Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, I’ve been working on plans to deliver cheaper, greener, and more secure sources of energy as well as accelerating efforts to make homes more energy efficient.

Having supported local residents and businesses through the pandemic, I’ll support people through these latest challenges as we continue to stand with people in Ukraine.

**New Housing Minister, same issues**

February’s mini reshuffle saw the appointment of Stuart Andrew MP as the new Housing Minister. I have already met him three times to stress local concerns about development in Kent.

While we need new homes for the next generation, local residents are understandably concerned about the scale and pace of what is being proposed.

With the Government currently working on planning reforms, this is the right time to be making the case for lower housing targets in Kent, and I’m glad that the Minister is listening to the views of MPs. I can assure local residents in Faversham and Mid Kent that their views are being heard.

**Maidstone Apprenticeship Fair returns**

March saw the return of the Maidstone Apprenticeship Fair. I set this Fair up back in 2018 along with 3 other local MPs as a way to match students with local job opportunities.

After missing last year because of Covid, I was so pleased to see it back and bigger than ever. This year we had around 1,500 local students attending along with employers ranging from global companies like Amazon and McDonald’s, right the way through to smaller local businesses.

It was especially good to see Faversham and Mid Kent well-represented with businesses like Shepherd Neame, MEP Ltd, Speedscreen, and Bedfont Scientific attending.

**Progress on wastewater improvements**

Having secured £2 million for the Wastewater Treatment Works in Faversham, I’m determined to see even more progress made to improve water quality and reduce flooding.

I recently chaired a meeting with Southern Water and local councillors for an update on work to improve the sewage network in Faversham, and I’m pleased to see that progress is being made at a number of sites.

Our new Environment Act gives us the power to set stronger targets and penalties for water companies. A consultation on the largest programme in history to tackle sewage discharges was launched at the end of March.

**End in sight for Brenley Corner delays**

Even by Brenley Corner standards, the traffic at this junction has been horrendous recently.

While Operation Brock is making traffic worse, there have been problems with this junction for a long time – problems which could get worse if Swale Borough Council get their way with plans for thousands of new homes around Faversham without a plan to improve local infrastructure.

At the beginning of April I had my latest meeting with the Roads Minister, Baroness Vere, who recognised that the case for investment at this junction stacked up well.

**Business roundtables back on**

In March I hosted the first in a series of roundtable meetings with small businesses in Faversham to hear from businesses first-hand about their concerns and what I can do to help.

It was clear from the discussion that we need to encourage people back into Faversham again, including fixing problems with parking and promoting our town as a destination for visitors.

I plan to host these meetings quarterly from now on. If you’re a small business and would like to take part, then please get in contact with me at helen.whately.mp@parliament.uk.

**Magna Carta Display on the way**

Faversham’s copy of Magna Carta is one of our town’s greatest treasures. But too few people know about it, and even fewer have actually seen it.

I’m delighted that this is about to change with a new exhibition coming soon to 12 Market Place which will showcase this historic document along with King Henry VIII’s Charter.

Huge thank you to everyone involved in helping to make the exhibition possible, including Faversham Town Council and the Faversham Society. Plans to put the Maga Carta on display have been in the pipeline for many years. It’s great to see them finally become a reality.