



Medway Progress

Winter / Spring 2004

Update from **Bob Marshall-Andrews** – Member of Parliament for Medway

Cash Injection for Medway

After years of campaigning by MP's, successive councils and local groups the Government has earmarked a major cash boost for Medway that will benefit key areas including housing, education and the environment.

The massive £56.6million investment includes:

- £28.5million for Rochester riverside to include mixed-use regeneration of this important site involving compulsory purchase of land to create a whole new neighbourhood, plus improved access to Rochester railway station. The vast project will also include land decontamination and better flood defences.
- £1 million for specialist transportation studies to determine how best to plan an integrated transport system for a growing Medway.
- £15 million for the new University of Medway – a unique partnership between the universities of Kent and Greenwich and Mid-Kent College. The money will be spent on new buildings on brownfield sites, and equipping and refurbishing further buildings. Exciting new academic schools of pharmacy, urban renaissance and European business are being created, along with a new learning resource centre open to the general public.
- £2 million for the Medway Renaissance Partnership to ensure that the plans are delivered.
- £10 million for Chatham Centre and waterfront.



On Strood Riverfront with the bridge end of Rochester Riverside in the background

This is obviously wonderful news that will allow the long overdue rebirth of the riverside area and the consolidation of a vibrant new university.

Not only will it bring substantial increases in employment and prosperity it will create a real centre for the second city of the South East. The Medway initiative is a crucial part of the jigsaw that fits together for the Thames Gateway plan that will transform the biggest brownfield site in Europe. This Government is ensuring that it will finally happen, much to Medway's benefit.

(Check out university latest – page 3)

V is for Airport Victory

I am delighted to report that the Government has now decided and without qualification to reject the concept of an airport at Cliffe.

This represents a huge and significant victory for community and environmental organisations and for thousands of local people who have campaigned long and hard for this result.

I feel extremely proud to have worked alongside so many of my constituents and to have ensured that the Government never underestimated our collective strength and determination. *I am especially pleased that this campaign has been free from party politics...we have all pulled together regardless of our political differences and proved what can be done in these circumstances when everyone is under threat.*



RSPB lobbyist outside the Houses of Parliament during the Westminster lobby, co-hosted by myself last October

We may even have achieved something that goes beyond victory. It was inevitable that any consultation should include a coastal site (as formerly with Maplin Sands) but the campaign has given us the opportunity to demonstrate the unique values of both our communities and our environment.

This will undoubtedly ensure far greater protection from future development and the creation of a National Park.

Welcome

Here is my latest newsletter to my constituents that contains good news for all of us thanks to the £56.6 million cash grant. Inside there is further good news for pensioners with details of how to claim extra money and information about keeping neighbourhood chemists.

Don't forget I am here to help – check out how you can get in touch with me on the back page and do drop in on my new look website – www.epolitix.com/westminster/bob-marshall-andrews

And a personnel note of thanks to all members of Siri Guru Ravidass Bhawan, Vicarage Road, Strood for allowing me to hold my surgeries in their Temple.

Best wishes,

Bob Marshall-Andrews QC MP

Save Our Open Green Spaces



On the front table alongside residents and Medway Labour Councillors, speaking out against the council's selling off of lands adjacent to Watts Meadow and Compass Close, for development, at the recent public meeting.

Boundary Sound-out

I have written to the Boundary Commission regarding the proposal to alter the boundary of the Medway parliamentary constituency suggesting that the name be changed from Medway. The creation Medway Council leaves people confused and the 'Medway' name does not reflect the locality of Westside of the Medway Towns and its historical city status. Therefore I have suggested that the name be altered to 'Rochester and Strood' constituency. Let me know what you think.

Strood Boost

The Government has allocated £1.3 million towards the Strood Environmental Scheme that will reduce traffic in the High Street.

Police Aid

Kent Police received the second highest grant outside London for extra community support officers.

The £400,000 worth of cash aid will pay for 40 extra community patrols that will concentrate on tackling anti-social behaviour.

Keep our local chemists healthy

I agree with the many thousands of local people who have supported the campaign to keep our local chemists following the Office of Fair Trading's proposals to scrap the limitation of pharmacy services.

I have received more than 30 letters and four petitions with some 4,000 signatures on the issue and consequently wrote to Health Minister Alan Milburn expressing these strong views.

The Government is now setting up an advisory group to reform arrangements taking into account the need to modernise rules governing pharmacists and to ensure fair competition and consumer choice.

There will be some exemptions to the rules including pharmacies locating in large shopping developments of more than 15,000 square metres, those opening for more than 100 hours a week and those located in the proposed 'one-stop' primary care centres. These exemptions will only

be available to pharmacies providing a full range of services and should prevent 'cherry-picking' of the more profitable areas of pharmacy business and ensure that the market available to smaller pharmacies is not undermined.



One of the petitions came from the customers of Coles Pharmacy, Darnley Road

Guaranties for Pensioners

The Pension Credit is now in place. The new entitlement for people aged 60 or over guarantees them an income of at least £102.10 a week if they are single or £155.80 a week if they have a partner.

It also makes certain that pensioners over 65 with small second pensions or modest savings will be rewarded. For far too long those who had managed to save a little were no better off than those who had not saved at all. Over half of all pensioners will benefit and, on average, single people will gain £400 per year and couples will be a

£1000 per year better off. You are likely to be entitled to the Pension Credit if your weekly income is less than £139.10 for single people or £203.80 for couples. And the good news is that Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are fully protected so you will be able to keep your full Pension Credit.

The Government is contacting all pensioner households with information about deciding about applying but if you think you may qualify call the free hotline now. Currently 6,457 Medway households are receiving the credit - average award is £44.25 every week.



As well as pension credit there is child tax credit – call Freephone 0800 500 222 for information to see if you qualify for money for nothing. Currently 17,900 Medway families are receiving the credit.

**Pension Credit
Free Hotline
Telephone
Number:**

**0800
99 1234**

University on Course

One of my primary aims when I became an MP for Medway was to fight for a university so it is with great pleasure that I include this update on how our very own 'uni' is progressing.

Apart from the £15million of new money promised (see front page story) the university already boasts around 3,500 students studying a choice of literally hundreds of different courses. This represents in excess of a four-fold increase in students, when compared to those at Pembroke when the university first started to develop seven years ago.

A new school of pharmacy has recently opened and Greenwich University's School

of Chemical and Life Sciences moved to the Medway campus earlier this year. Nursing studies are now also available. In the pipeline are combined studies programmes in areas such as business with French, Chemistry with Spanish, Education and business, etc. It is also proposed to move University of Kent and Mid Kent Collage to a new location alongside Greenwich's Medway Maritime campus.

By 2008 we will have a thriving community of approximately 6,500 students – spending monies on local facilities and services – pumping £10 million a year into Medway's economy – creating 600 jobs.



During a recent visit to Hundred of Hoo Comprehensive School

Real Local Heroes

It was a real privilege to nominate two of my constituents for a special acknowledgment from the Experience Corps that is an excellent organisation that brings together people over 50 with skills that benefit the community.

I joined Mrs Pat Wilson and Mrs Anne Wade for tea at the House of Commons as part of the Experience Corps 'Local Heroes' project.



Presenting Anne with her award

I put forward Anne, from Frindsbury, for her outstanding long-term work for the Frindsbury and Wainscott Community Association, mostly involving planning issues.

Pat, from Rochester, was honoured for her dedication and work for the Open Spaces Society. She has had a long and lasting impact on the rural environment of the area.

Why not join the Experience Corps?
– Telephone free on **0800 106080**
or log onto **www.experiencecorps.co.uk**

Fintrade Technologies

At the end of last year Medway witnessed an industrial collapse which was both shocking and shameful.

On the 3rd November the near entire workforce of Fintrade Technologies was laid off without warning or notice. Many of the 180 employees were not paid for work done to the time of lay-off and no one received monies in lieu of notice.

Weeks passed and employees were still to be provided with proper documentation as evidence of termination of their employment. During that period, when they were without a P45 or a formal redundancy notice, they were precluded from receiving redundancy monies, applying for benefit, receiving monies from insurance policies (e.g. mortgage protection) or being entirely free to apply for alternative employment. As a result many of the employees were left

literally without subsistence, relying upon help from friends and family and even street collections in the run up to Christmas.

At my surgery at the beginning of November I was briefed by a large number



Being interviewed outside the gates of Fintrade with the locked out employees

of constituents representing those most seriously affected. Fortunately I was able to open immediate lines of communication with the senior Government Minister, Desmond Browne, and regional and national officials of the Benefits Agency and JobCentre. The result was by no means perfect but it did enable, in most cases, the payment of claims in time for the Christmas holidays and credit is due to those members of staff at JobCentres who put in extra days and hours to achieve this result. Many families however still face the prospect of financial loss and insecurity, both as to immediate employment income and future pension. In the coming year I will do all I can to ensure that this excellent, loyal and skilled workforce receive justice and that this company, now in liquidation, is subject to full and public scrutiny.

Both Global and Local

By any standards 2003 was an exceptional year in both national and local politics.

The national and international agenda was dominated by the war in Iraq. I was strongly opposed to this conflict. I voted against it and was one of a number of backbench Members who signed the principle amendment which called for more time to investigate claims of weapons of mass destruction. I spoke in both the main debates and at numerous meetings. My opposition did not stem from any support of the Saddam regime and, indeed, I was one of many who bitterly opposed in the past support given to him. As with Members of Parliament of all parties opposed to this policy I strongly rejected any allegations of anti-Americanism. Following my debate at the Oxford Union I received over 200 supporting e-mails from America. The military outcome was never in any doubt but the future undoubtedly is.

In holding and expressing these views I do not, in any sense, underestimate or fail to admire the actions and the exemplary behaviour of British Armed



Speaking in the House of Commons during Prime Minister's Questions

forces, many of whom, as I well know, are firmly rooted in the traditions of the Medway Towns.

I continue to believe, however, that the most powerful and ultimately the only way to defeat global terrorism is to address and eradicate the conditions of injustice, poverty and oppression upon which terrorism thrives. This was one of the reasons why I was profoundly disappointed at the failure of the globalisation talks at Cancun. I do, however, consider that the position taken by the Government on behalf of Britain was both constructive and worthy of support. In Parliament I will continue to work through backbench organisations and colleagues to ensure that our position remains unchanged.

I have also been vigorously involved in other national issues such as the Criminal Justice Bill and Parliamentary reform. These speeches may be found on my website.

I do also understand that on these and important domestic issues there are conflicting and entirely honourable opinions and I genuinely welcome and value constructive discussion and debate. I will always respond to the expression of such views.

In Medway a number of issues have also achieved the highest priority and some of these are featured in this newsletter. The largest single issue was, of course, the airport proposal. I have received over 3,500 personal letters to which I was able to reply with regular up-



On Rochester riverside with representatives of Blytheswood Care Charity and mhs Community Charity.

date and reports. I attended and spoke at four public meetings (including two with over 2,000 people) and co-hosted the lobby at Westminster. A petition containing over 3,000 signatures was delivered by me to No. 10. Newsletters have been delivered to every household on the Peninsula reporting progress and my meetings with Ministers (including the Prime Minister) on this issue. Regular meetings were held with the Stop the Airport Campaign, the RSPB, the Dickens Countryside Presentation Society, BAA and Manston Airport. I would like once again to pay tribute to these organisations and to so many other groups and individuals who made victory possible

At the end of the day I share a profound sense of relief. Progress towards a nationally recognised and protected area is now the priority and I hope to be able to report progress next year.

I have continued to hold regular meetings with the Superintendent of Medway

Police, the CEO of the Health Trust and with Council Officers. These will continue. I have also visited many schools and a large number of local organisations including the Royal Engineers, University of Greenwich (Medway campus), Medway Carers' Centre and Blytheswood Care Charity.

I have continued to hold regular, well attended surgeries and been able to provide advice and assistance in more than 500 different cases, involving a wide range of issues that are listed below. In turn, this has generated over 1,500 letters.

Finally I cannot resist reporting that (as an ex-player) I have continued to be an active member of the All-Party Rugby Group chaired by my friend and colleague, Derek Wyatt, the MP for Sittingbourne and I apologise for the (very short) interruption during my surgery on the 22 November to enable the watching of the final minutes of a magnificent World Cup final.

Can I Help?

Around every two weeks I hold a surgery locally to offer help and advice to constituents on a wide range of issues.

These include:

Benefit claims, including housing and incapacity issues, Pensions and/or associated payments, Child Support Agency, Planning issues, Medical/treatment problems, Crime/Law and Order, Environmental Damage, Obtaining visas.

Don't worry if your problem does not fit into one or more of the above categories. Just ask for a surgery form and give me brief details.

Here's how to get in touch:

- **BY TELEPHONE** – 01634 814687
- **BY POST** – Bob Marshall-Andrews QC MP, Moat House, 1 Castle Hill, Rochester, Kent ME1 1QQ
- **BY EMAIL** – marshallandrewsr@parliament.uk
- **BY WEBSITE** – www.epolitix.com/westminster/bob-marshall-andrews
- **BY FAX** – 01634 831294