**Parish Update – March 2023**

**Faversham – Helen Whately**

**Tackling tough problems**

Last Friday marked an extraordinary milestone.

It has now been over a year that the Ukrainian people have held out against Putin’s full-scale invasion. A remarkable display of courage and resolve, holding off a far more powerful neighbour determined to take away their freedom.

We should be immensely proud of the support this country has and continues to provide to Ukraine, not least here in Kent where we’ve taken in more Ukrainian refugees that any other county.

At times like these when the world feels like a dangerous place, it’s more important than ever to keep your friends close.

That’s just one of the reasons why this week’s Windsor Agreement is such good news.

Many thought it wouldn’t be possible to find an agreement with the EU that protects Northern Ireland’s place in the UK while honouring the Good Friday Agreement. But through careful negotiation and a determination to make things better Rishi has pulled the rabbit out of the hat.

It’s typical of the leadership he’s showing. Taking issues which matter to the British public, poring over the details, and then finding a solution. He did it with the small boats, he’s done it on Northern Ireland, and he’s doing it on inflation too with recent figures showing things starting to move in the right direction.

I know first-hand that he’s doing it in the NHS too, where in my role as a Health Minister I’ve been working flat out on things like getting healthy patients out of hospital and into more suitable care - helping to bring ambulance waiting times down by over two thirds from December to January.

Things are tough at the moment, but under Rishi’s leadership they’ll keep on getting better.

I’m working really hard to make things better at a local level too.

Last month I hosted a roundtable in Chart Sutton to crack down on rural crime, and agreed some really important next steps with police.

I’ve also been keeping up the fight for improvements to our local road network, and recently teamed up with neighbouring MP Tracey Crouch to press the Roads Minister for Blue Bell Hill funding.

And, after months of lobbying from Kent MPs, the Housing Department has announced a new consultation on National Planning Policy - including plans to scrap mandatory housing targets in places like Kent.

You can read more about this and lots more that I’ve been up to below.

And finally, it is a huge honour to represent Faversham and Mid Kent and serve my constituents, and so I’m really proud to have been reselected as the Conservative candidate for the next election.

There’s lots to be getting on with locally, and I’m determined to carry on representing the area to the very best of my ability.

**Minister signs up to swing bridge action**

Faversham's swing bridge has been out of action for far too long.

Local negotiations have reached a stalemate, and so in December I met with the Maritime Minister Baroness Vere to ask for the Government's support in getting things moving forward. I've since heard back with some really good news.

She’s intervened to get information from parties which to date hadn't been received, and set Department for Transport policy and legal officials to work reviewing all the information. She’s then going to work out what would be most sensible and effective going forwards.

I’m determined to get this bridge fixed.

**Planning consultation can help us get housing right**

Ask any Kent MP what issue - come rain or shine - fills their constituency postbag more than any other and I think they’d tell you the same thing: housing.

Along with other local MPs I’ve been fighting to get the current national planning policy reviewed, and just before Christmas we found out that we’d been successful when the Government put forward its plans for updating the National Planning Policy Framework.

Plans include a move away from mandatory housing targets towards advisory, and there’s also tougher rules to make sure developers meet community commitments, as well as a renewed focus on finding more brownfield sites.

I’m writing to the Secretary of State with my constituent’s views – if you’d like to pass on yours, please email me at helen.whately.mp@parliament.uk

**Cracking down on rural crime**

Rural crime can be so tough on local communities. You can feel isolated living in the countryside and it’s really important that police are on hand to help.

At the end of January I hosted a roundtable in Chart Sutton with my fellow Maidstone MP Helen Grant to put some local concerns to police.

It was great to hear officers commit to doing more. We agreed a set of actions to go away and work on over the next few months, including expanding the Rural Task Force, making sure each ward has its own named officer, and reducing the time taken to answer 101 calls.

**Good news from Faversham's GPs**

I've been supporting Faversham’s GPs as they work to boost their services.

When I visited them recently I got some really positive updates. Newton Place is making great use of their recent expansion to see more patients, and I’m glad I was able to help them secure funding to do this. Faversham Medical Practice meanwhile has a new phone system making it easier to book appointments and helping to end the 8am scramble for a slot.

It is great to see investment in local health services meaning more GP appointments available and better care for the town's residents.

**Could care be the right career for you?**

The care sector can be a wonderful place to work.

I see this all the time. As well as being Faversham and Mid Kent’s MP I’m also a minister in the Health and Social Care Department, and one of the things I’m tasked with is overseeing the government’s work on social care.

It’s one of those rare jobs where you can make a difference every day, and it can also offer really good flexibility - meaning you can fit work around other commitments like childcare. We need more people to join this fantastic workforce, and have set up a website where you can search for jobs and information: www.adultsocialcare.co.uk