



Hello everyone

Despite the recent smattering of snow, the weather seems to have improved a little since my last update, even providing us with a beautiful few days of sunshine over the second weekend in March. Nevertheless, the fallout from the floods continues to be foremost in our minds and I've been working closely with key stakeholders to ensure lessons are learned and action is taken going forward. You can read about some of the steps I'm taking below.

It has been an action-packed month in Westminster and the constituency with International Women's Day, the Celebrate Maidstone Awards, the Sochi Olympic and Paralympic games and a Royal Visit to Yalding. I have been lucky enough to partake in some wonderful activities and initiatives, highlights of which I have outlined for you below.

My regular surgeries will continue over the coming months at my office premises in Knightrider Street in central Maidstone, full details of which can be found on my website.

Hope to see you in and around the constituency.

Very best wishes

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Helen".

Flooding Round Table

At the end of February I convened and chaired a round table meeting of key stakeholders to consider recent flooding in the constituency. I saw how badly communities were affected by the floods when I visited Yalding, Allington and Maidstone town centre on Boxing Day and during the ensuing week. Having spoken with many residents and businesses, I resolved to do



whatever I could to tackle the issue of flooding which has caused extensive damage over so many years. The meeting was attended by representatives from the Environment Agency, Emergency Services, County, Borough and Parish Councils, National Farmers Union, residents and local businesses. It provided the opportunity to share experiences of the floods and consider solutions going forward. I have since drafted an action plan suggesting responsibility for action for relevant stakeholders and to ensure a coordinated approach in future. I have put my plan to stakeholders for their consideration and input and hope to publish my report in full in the near future.

Royal Visit to Yalding

I was honoured to welcome Their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall to Yalding last week following the devastating Christmas and New Year floods.

The royal visit was a real boost for the local community still recovering from the aftermath of the floods, and I think strengthened all our resolves to take action to protect vulnerable areas like Yalding in future. Having consulted with the Environment Agency after the round table meeting, I know they submitted bids for two flood defence schemes on the 7th March. These include increasing the capacity of the Leigh Barrier by 30% and creating a Lower Beult Storage Area.



Subsequently, I have written to the Chancellor and the Environment Secretary to reinforce the case for capital investment in these projects and request an urgent meeting to discuss funding and implementation. I will keep you up to date with any developments on this matter and will be convening another round table meeting in the near future to ensure progress.

Sochi

Following her brilliant win in Sochi, Maidstone's golden girl Lizzy Yarnold has been out and about in Kent celebrating her achievement - even getting a bus painted gold in her honour! I was lucky enough to catch up with Lizzy at an International Women's Day reception championing Britain's multitude of inspirational women. Lizzy is such a great role model for all



our children, and perfectly embodied this year's Women's Day theme of 'inspiring change'. The Sochi Olympics were fantastic for Britain, being our most successful games in 90 years, and it wasn't just our Olympians that delivered. Paralympics GB also broke records in Sochi, with our best ever team performance - Kelly Gallagher winning our first ever gold medal and Jade Etherington clinching 4 medals. Fantastic!

International Women's Day

On International Women's Day I went to watch the England Under-15 Girls take on the Republic of Ireland at Maidstone's Gallagher Stadium on a beautiful sunny day. Our girls produced a spectacular 8-0 victory - although the score perhaps did not reflect the quality of the game!



It was brilliant to see Maidstone's own Alessia Russo playing in the England squad, and at half time I was delighted to present some medals to a group of younger competitors who were taking part in the South East under-11 seven-a-side tournament that was also taking place at the stadium. The girls' passion and enthusiasm was palpable, and with these girls set to become role models of the future, like Lizzy Yarnold, I'm confident women's sport will continue to go from strength to strength

Maidstone United's 3G Pitch Campaign

Speaking of the Gallagher stadium, I must mention Maidstone United's campaign for 3G pitches in the Football Conference, a campaign I fully support. The Stones are currently in the hunt for promotion from the Ryman Premier league to the Conference South, but these state-of-the-art 3G pitches are not permitted in any Conference leagues.



Encouragingly, their campaign received a big boost this week after the FA announced that 3G pitches would be permitted in the FA Cup from next season. In my role as Minister for Sport, I've been holding discussions with FA executives and senior representatives from the Football Conference lobbying for a change of the rules to also allow these fantastic surfaces in the Conference.

Maidstone's pitch offers so many benefits to the club and local community. Whether that's guaranteeing an important Saturday fixture with its weather-resistant turf, getting disabled youngsters engaged in sport or providing top-notch training facilities for aspiring academy players, 3G could hold the key to revitalising the game at the grassroots and has proved invaluable in Maidstone. I will continue to press the case for a change in the rules but in the meantime, let's hope the positive results for Maidstone United on this superb surface keep coming!

Celebrate Maidstone!

I was privileged to attend the Celebrate Maidstone Gala awards for the second year running and honoured to present the award for Star Neighbour to Laraine Soliman. Laraine is a real pillar of her community, loved and respected by her whole street. I would like to pay tribute to the team at Celebrate Maidstone for putting together this brilliant event championing the unsung heroes across our communities.

Maidstone has a multitude of inspirational men and women and it was truly heartwarming to hear about some of the work that goes on. I very much look forward to next year's event and hope to be a part of such a marvellous evening once again. Huge congratulations to all the winners!

