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...ing with flood prevention works, could enhance what we have, at the same time, Parish Plan and Village Design Statement

# Our Man in Westminster

by Damian Collins



**W**e have endured the largest amount of rainfall in living memory and the pressure that this places on our flood defences

has continued. Last Friday I organised a meeting with the Environment Agency and the Romney Marsh Area Internal Drainage Board to discuss the local response to the floods and to see what else could be done.

The Environment Agency team have worked tirelessly to support the community and provide measures to help manage the build up of water.

On Romney Marsh this had included installing additional temporary pumps to help lower and control the levels in the watercourses. On Monday this week they received a large 24 inch in diameter pump shipped in from the Netherlands, and which can remove approximately 1,000 litres of water per second. It has been placed at the Grand Redoubt sluice near Dymchurch and is helping to lower water levels in the Royal Military Canal, one of the largest watercourses on the Marsh. By lowering water levels in this canal the

Environment Agency is helping to create capacity for watercourses across the Marsh to drain into it.

The government is providing extra financial resources to the Environment Agency so that it can put in place these additional emergency measures. The prime minister has also announced that for homeowners and businesses which have been affected by flooding, the government will provide repair grants of up to £5,000 per house and per business to help people build in better flood protection as they repair their homes and businesses. Businesses which have been affected by the floods will get 100 per cent business rate relief for three months and will get an extra three months to pay the business taxes they owe. Farmers who are suffering from water-logged fields will also be able to benefit from a £10 million fund which will help to restore farm land as quickly as possible. The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will open applications for this at the end of February.

■ Esther McVey, the Minister for Employment, was in Folkestone last

Thursday to attend a special event organised by the local team from the Department for Work and Pensions, focused on supporting young people to find work through completing work experience and apprenticeship programmes. I also attended this meeting, held at The Grand, which has itself established an excellent apprenticeship programme at the hotel. It was inspiring to hear the stories of people who had benefited from programmes like these. In the Folkestone and Hythe area, over half of the young people who take a work experience placement go on directly into full time work.

■ Last week I also spoke at a special event at Canary Wharf in London to promote business investment in East Kent. The event was organised by the 'Grow for it' campaign which has been set up by Kent County Council to build awareness of the opportunities that exist in our area. There was a special focus on creative and digital businesses, and the emerging clusters of these in East Kent; particularly in Folkestone, Canterbury and Ramsgate. We now have over 200 businesses in this sector in the Shepway district.



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