



## **New Romney Town Council – Press Release**



### **Healthcare Provision on the Romney Marsh**

**New Romney Town Council** has this week expressed its concern regarding the inadequacy of National Health Service Provision for New Romney and the surrounding Romney Marsh and has urged the Secretary of State for Health – The Right Honourable Jeremy Hunt, MP, to consider, in light of a wide range of issues regarding local healthcare, what can be done to safeguard local human life and protect the health and well-being of local residents in this area, which has very poor transportation infrastructure and is a recognised area of deprivation.

The Secretary of State for Health has been advised in a letter from the Town Council that a number of issues have caused local residents to raise concerns about the level of healthcare provision for the Romney Marsh – or lack of it – not least, the recently announced closure of the chemotherapy unit at the William Harvey Hospital, Ashford, which is the hospital which serves the whole of the Romney Marsh and the extremely poor transport infrastructure in this area which impacts on the ability of the ambulance service to reach a patient in an emergency in adequate time to ensure a positive outcome.

The Secretary of State for Health was further advised that news of the impending retirement of one of the local General Practitioners, has meant that one of our local doctor's surgeries is set to close within the coming weeks, which will result in increased pressure on the already strained healthcare service with all of those patients having to be re-registered at one of the three remaining surgeries in the New Romney to Dymchurch area, which are already extremely over-stretched and unable to meet the demands of local patients.

It was also pointed out that as further large-scale housing developments are being proposed for New Romney (highlighted within the District Council's Core Strategy), the area is facing a crisis in local healthcare provision whereby demand by far outstrips supply.

The Town Council advised The Right Honourable Jeremy Hunt, MP that whilst there may now be walk-in health centres strategically located around Kent, which have been developed to serve the needs of Kent's NHS patients in a holistic approach to healthcare, the healthcare needs of the Romney Marsh appear to have been over-looked when planning the locations of these centres - the nearest of which is in Folkestone. He was further advised that a visit to the Folkestone Walk-In Centre is prohibitive to many residents of New Romney and the surrounding Romney Marsh due to the remoteness of this area and lack of transport infrastructure, which results in an extremely lengthy journey by public transport for those who do not have access to a private vehicle and in substantial cost for public transportation for residents of what is recognised as a deprived area. Furthermore, in the event of an emergency, there is no means of accessing emergency treatment in adequate time to ensure a positive outcome due to the

lengthy journey times from New Romney to the nearest emergency treatment centre, whether that be the William Harvey Hospital, Ashford or the walk-in centre in Folkestone. It was pointed out that the demographics of New Romney reveal a predominantly ageing population who, by their very nature, have a greater need for and reliance on healthcare services. This adds to the pressures faced by existing service providers and this will only get worse in time and that, furthermore, a similar demographic model is replicated all over the Romney Marsh. Hence, the need for improvement in local healthcare provision.

The Secretary of State for Health was advised that in light of the above points, it is clear that further investment in healthcare for New Romney and the Romney Marsh is urgently required – in particular to provide for a 24/7 walk in medical centre that would cater for all Romney Marsh residents and provide a drop-in centre for all of those healthcare services that are more difficult to access from this remote and deprived area of Kent.

The Town Council suggested that one way of remedying this situation would be the development of a 24/7 walk-in medical centre, which could be located at the current Station Road Clinic / Health Centre in New Romney, which could be extended for this purpose; the site being adjacent a small play area that is in poor repair and relatively under-used. It was explained that a larger health centre would provide a key service hub in a central and easily accessible location on the Romney Marsh. As the District Service Hub for the Romney Marsh (as identified in the District Council Core Strategy), the Town Council advised that it considers that it is important that a new healthcare facility is located in New Romney but available to all residents of the Romney Marsh, adding that it is imperative that as New Romney has been identified within the District Council Core Strategy as the strategic service hub for the Romney Marsh, health service provision within the Town of New Romney should not continue to be de-graded but should, in fact, be enhanced to meet the needs of the surrounding area. To this end, the Town Council advised that it considers that further s106 investment should be allocated towards this basic requirement with contributions from developments across the Romney Marsh assisting with the funding of a new bespoke healthcare facility in the service hub Town of New Romney.

To support the Town Council's view that this matter must be considered as a high priority, the Secretary of State was provided with evidence from applied research undertaken by the Town Council which revealed a number of local 'case studies' that highlight some of the local healthcare issues and problems that are currently faced in the New Romney area and that will, without doubt, only become worse as time passes.

The Right Worshipful the Mayor of New Romney, Councillor Mrs Patricia Rolfe expressed her concerns about Health Service Provision on the Romney Marsh, stating:

*'The problems faced by the medical service providers and, subsequently, their patients on the Romney Marsh have been highlighted by many residents. These*

*issues will only become worse as further housing developments impact on our basic infrastructure. Residents in rural areas are facing discrimination – the poor transport infrastructure combined with a proposed reduction in the number of part-time medical centres mean that lives may be put at risk. New Romney Town Council are lobbying for an improved 24/7 walk-in health centre on Romney Marsh and are seeking the support of the Secretary of State for Health – the Right Honourable Jeremy Hunt, MP and our local MP – Damian Collins. We need local residents to support us and add further weight to our cause.'*

She added:

*'Residents on the 'Fifth Continent' deserve the right to a 'First Class' and not a 'Third World' local Health Service provision; that particularly includes accessibility and appropriate emergency response times.'*

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