

Gareth Johnson MP for Dartford

Reporting back from Dartford
and Westminster - now reaching
over 5,000 people in the local
area



Winter 2018

Welcome to my latest newsletter.



SURGERY DATES

By Appointment Only:

Bluewater

11th January

8th February

8th March

5th April

10th May



 [Website](#)

Remembrance events

November saw the Remembrance Sunday service in Central Park in Dartford, where I laid a wreath at the memorial. This is always a poignant event and was especially so this year being the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War.

In other commemorations around the country, beacons were lit to mark the centenary. In Hartley crowds gathered to see the beacon lit and to take part in a service led by Reverend Jim Fletcher. Earlier in the evening, entertainment was provided by Local Vocals and the WI and Scouts provided refreshments. At 7.00 pm the beacon was lit as part of a chain of beacons and fires across the country.

During the remembrance weekend, I also attended the unveiling of a plaque in Swanscombe to mark the site where it is thought the town's biggest loss of life occurred during the Second World War. This bombing took place just after 8.00 pm on 10th November 1940 at The Morning Star pub in Swanscombe, where a darts match with a neighbouring team was underway. Up to 27 people were killed and a similar number were wounded. It is fitting that a plaque now marks the place of this awful tragedy in memory of the people who lost their lives during that terrible evening.



Wisdom Estates

Each month I like to feature a local business, large or small and this month's is Wisdom Estates, located in Dartford town centre.

Wisdom Estates was founded by Robert Wisdom (Managing Director) in 2013, when the doors were opened to the Spital Street office.

Robert was disillusioned with the industry and decided to put his drive, ambition and passion for homes into Wisdom Estates. He has blended successful high street expertise with the most modern and latest marketing techniques to bring selling a home into the 21st Century.

This family-run, estate agents has decades of



Tree planting at Cherry Orchard Primary Academy

I was delighted to join staff and pupils at Cherry Orchard Primary Academy to plant five trees as part of the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy. This project is made up of a number of forest conservation initiatives to mark the Queen's lifetime of service to the Commonwealth.

The trees were donated thanks to a partnership between the Woodland Trust, Sainsbury's and ITV, which in April screened The Queen's Green Planet, following this ambitious project which brings together the Queen's deeply held commitment to the Commonwealth and her little-known love of trees.

During the planting, I was ably assisted by pupils from Nursery to Year 3, who helped me plant one of the five trees in the forest area of the school at Castle Hill.

experience in estate agency, marketing and customer service and in the near future is excited to be opening a brand new office in Sidcup.

Wisdom Estates aim to ensure your property is marketed to the highest standard by using experienced photographers, videographers and editors.

If you would like to find out more about Wisdom Estates, please click on the link below.

[Wisdom Estates](#)



Stone retirement group

Stone Parish Council arranges a get-together

Cherry Orchard, in Ebbsfleet Garden City, is our newest primary school and it seemed fitting to donate the trees, two silver birch, two rowan and a hazel, to the school for their forest area. The trees will grow as the school grows and I hope the children will follow their progress over the coming years.



Keyes Lodge

It was a pleasure to be asked to cut the ribbon on Churchill Retirement Living's new Keyes Lodge development in King Edward Avenue.

Retirement properties are a crucial part of helping to unblock the UK's housing crisis and this new development is a significant addition to the housing provision here in Dartford.

Specialist retirement housing is proven to have a beneficial effect on older people's health and wellbeing, be it from living in a modern, warm, well insulated home, to having a sense of community which helps to beat loneliness.

every month for senior citizens that live in the parish to come along and meet friends over tea and cake and listen to a presentation or take part in an activity.

I was invited along recently to speak to them about my work as the local MP and the challenges affecting the local area and the country at the moment. We talked about local issues, the Dartford Crossing and development generally in the Dartford area.

George Low

The inquest into the death of George Low, from Dartford, who was killed in Ayia Napa in August 2016, at the age of 22, was held in Cyprus at the end of November.

Earlier this year I

It was great to meet some of the new owners and hear so many positive stories from them and I wish them all well in their new homes.



Arriva

I recently met with the Managing Director at Arriva Kent and Surrey to discuss concerns raised by constituents about service levels and changes to routes. He told me that Arriva sometimes experience problems with local congestion and are taking steps to increase the number of buses on busy routes.

travelled to Cyprus to try to get some answers for George's family, as the two suspects in the case have never been brought to justice. Sali Ahmet and Mehmet Akinpar fled to Northern Cyprus after the attack and were arrested there for unrelated offences. Both men are now free, having been released without charge, despite being the main suspects and subject to a European Arrest Warrant and an Interpol Red Notice.

The last two years have been a living nightmare for George's family, who travelled to Cyprus to find out more about how their son died. The inquest has concluded and the Judge will be issuing his findings in due course.



I also raised with him the importance of providing and protecting a reliable service to the villages and more rural areas in the constituency, along with improving communication with passengers.

Arriva confirmed it is launching a new and improved app in 2019 which will provide more reliable information and is continuing work on the roll-out of smart ticketing.

News from Westminster



Two-year degrees

The Universities Minister has announced the expansion of two-year degrees.

It follows a consultation on the proposal to roll out shorter university courses, also known as accelerated degrees, creating an unprecedented level of choice and flexibility for people wanting to study in higher education, particularly mature students.

Accelerated degrees are mostly in, but not limited to, subjects such as accountancy, financial management and law, where accrediting bodies are developing accelerated courses for rapid graduate employment. Accelerated degrees are also expected to be made

EU Withdrawal Agreement

Hardly a day goes by without there being a significant Brexit story hitting the headlines. The Government has delayed the 'meaningful vote' until the week commencing 14th January, while the Prime Minister endeavours to make changes to her deal with the EU. Time will tell if she can be successful in seeking to change the text of the 'back-stop' which has proved to be the most controversial aspect of it.

Earlier in December, the Prime Minister faced a vote of no confidence from within the Conservative Party whilst she was seeking to change the deal which, to me, appeared to be astonishing timing.

The House of Commons seems to be very clear about what it doesn't want for the Brexit process, but less clear about what it does want.

I feel very strongly that Parliament was given an instruction by the people in 2016 to leave the EU and this must be respected. If the House of Commons were to say to people they need to have another vote, it would be a betrayal of that clear instruction.

available for the vast majority of other courses too.

These degrees meet exactly the same quality assurance measures as standard degrees and will provide exactly the same level of qualification.

A two-year accelerated degree will condense 3-year degrees with 30 weeks teaching into 2 years with 45 weeks teaching. In addition, students who opt for a two-year degree course will save at least 20% (£5,500) in total tuition costs compared to a standard three-year degree.

BBC Licence consultation for over 75s

The BBC has launched a consultation to decide



Finally, I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and an enjoyable 2019!

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how licence fees for over 75s should be paid.

When the Government launched the free licence fee for over 75s in 2000, it was argued the benefits would largely go to poorer households. That argument has weakened with the improvement in living standards for over 75s. This Government funding is due to end in 2020.

The consultation is open until 12th February and if you would like to take part, please click on the button below.

[BBC Consultation](#)