

# TOM TUGENDHAT MBE MP



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

20 October 2021

Bill Millar  
Director of Primary Care  
Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group  
Kent House  
81 Station Road  
Ashford  
Kent  
TN23 1PP

Dear Bill,

As you may have seen developers at Broadwater Farm in West Malling, on the border of Kings Hill, have submitted a planning application to Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council for around 900 new homes. This level of development will stretch the already strained infrastructure in and around West Malling and Kings Hill.

You will be aware of my longstanding concerns about GP capacity in and around West Malling. This is no criticism of GPs at West Malling Group Practice whatsoever, as they have showed through Malling Primary Care Network during the vaccination programme that they have an ability to put the health needs of our community first.

I know we have discussed this before and I am grateful for your response dated 23 July 2021 which details the work Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (KMCCG) are doing to resolve the issue of capacity in the area. However, the submission of this planning application and potential development will, I believe, push our medical infrastructure locally beyond the point of no return.

In your letter of 23 July 2021 you advised that KMCCG had picked up discussions the former West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group held with West Malling Group Practice about waiting times for appointments. I would be keen if you could update on these discussions to establish what additional capacity is available at the Kings Hill and Leybourne sites, that could accommodate all of the existing population as well as potential residents at Broadwater Farm, as well as other growth in the area.

In addition, your letter provides assurance that KMCCG assesses each planning application individually and within the context of assessed cumulative development. This is an essential point because it is the cumulative development in the West Malling Group practice area, along with the reduction in availability of appointments, that is causing so much concern for residents.

I was also grateful for a copy of the General Practice Estates Strategy produced by KMCCG in August 2021, which is a very interesting piece of work and one that will be essential to be

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right if GP capacity can be planned appropriately, given the level of housing development across the whole county. This document confirms the period which the strategy lasts for factors in a population growth of 5,827 across the Malling PCN area. However, it only factors in an additional 1,874 people from 781 dwellings at both West Malling Group Practice and Wateringbury Surgery. The planning application submitted by Berkeley Homes alone is for around 900 units, which shows that less than two months after it has been written, this document is already underestimating the level of development in the area. In turn this will underestimate the level of GP provision required.

My lack of confidence in the Estates Strategy is underlined by the failure to identify specific improvements detailed at section 7.10 on page 60, where it identifies premises development and improvements. While there are specific proposals for new premises for Phoenix Medical Practice and Thornhills Medical Practice, unfortunately there are only discussions referred to for Kings Hill. In fact, the situation locally has been compounded by decisions made or endorsed by KMCCG which have harmed the ability of residents to be able to see a GP.

Despite local opposition and having spent a considerable amount of time speaking to local residents and campaigning against its closure, the removal of all GP services from West Malling will no doubt have a detrimental effect on availability to deal with increased capacity. Given that the justification for the closures is to ensure a full-time service at Leybourne and Kings Hill, it does not allow any ability to expand to cope with additional residents. Indeed, where facilities are provided such as on Leybourne Chase, KMCCG or its predecessors cannot find any GPs to occupy them. This is a waste of time and money, which gives residents false hope that the issues faced with GP capacity will be addressed.

Every day I receive e-mails and letters from residents unable to contact their GP. While I accept there are many strains on the system nationally, this problem is more acute and obvious in the West Malling Group Practice area. This is no fault of the excellent and hardworking GPs, but the culmination of a system that does not provide for enough GPs and medical facilities to cope with the current population.

As the organisation responsible for planning healthcare locally, KMCCG has an obligation to make sure development only happens with more, better, medical facilities. As a consultee on planning applications KMCCG has the ability to recommend that development proposals are refused because the primary care infrastructure is unable to cope, and the quantity of development will not generate contributions to ensure that residents can receive better medical facilities.

It is clear that there is no evidence in KMCCG's own work on future estates strategy and GP provision that it intends on reversing the decisions taken in recent years which have seen a clear reduction in facilities available to residents in and around West Malling for access to GPs. Consequently, there will not be the ability to cater for additional residents on the scale that are anticipated by the Broadwater Farm proposals. Consequently, KMCCG has no option but to object to this planning application and all others within the catchment area.

I look forward to you doing so. Given the public consultation on the planning application I am



sharing this letter with local residents, and copying in Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and local Parish Councils.

*Best wishes,*

*Tom Tugendhat*

**TOM TUGENDHAT**

CC:

Cllr David Lettington, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

Eleanor Hoyle, Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council

West Malling Parish Council

Kings Hill Parish Council