

This week I was delighted to welcome my good friend and colleague the Defence Minister Mark Lancaster to Aylesford to lay a ceremonial brick at the development of new veteran accommodation by the RBLI. The housing is all part of the Borough's commitment to the military covenant and will hopefully be finished and ready for the first tenants next February.

Among the invited guests was RBLI employee Anil Gurung who seized silver alongside other injured veterans in the GB Sitting Volleyball team at the Invictus Games earlier this month. Talking to Anil was fabulous. He was so brilliantly competitive, something I love, but it was also clear how important sport had been to him in his rehabilitation, along with the support of the RBLI.

Aylesford has a long history of supporting our veterans. One hundred years ago Preston Hall was being used as a hospital for wounded servicemen, building a reputation for the treatment of tuberculosis, endemic in the trenches. Army officers recognised the need for Preston Hall to continue as a centre for the treatment of TB after the war and so at a time when the only prescription for it was fresh air and rest, the cottages were built with verandas so that patient's beds could be pushed outside and were large enough that patient's families could live with them. At the same time affected personnel were given work to help with their mental and physical rehabilitation creating a sense of self-worth.

This ethos of housing, employment and wellbeing support remains a core and fundamental not just to the RBLI but also to all those who support the military covenant. I don't need reminding of how brilliant the RBLI is but these visits make me realise how proud I am to represent them and all they stand for in Parliament.