

Haven on Wright path

DURING a visit to a homeless shelter, a Government minister spoke to The Comet about the necessity for housing in this area, how homelessness is being handled, and how to combat the recession.

Iain Wright, MP for Hartlepool and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government, was welcomed

by staff and residents at Stevenage Haven last Thursday.

During a tour of the building, Mr Wright spoke to residents who told him how staff at Stevenage Haven have proactively helped them acquire the skills needed to go out and get jobs.

One young man, who did not want to be named, told how he is now a qualified plumber and plasterer.

Mr Wright said: "Not only do staff give people a place to stay, but they proactively help them to get jobs. These people are

getting real skills to go out and get real work. This place gives people real hope."

Mr Wright said the reason for his visit was to see what is on offer for people who are homeless in the area.

He said it was great to see how proactive staff at Stevenage Haven, adding: "If you are reactive all the time, how on earth can you get your life back on track and find stability?"

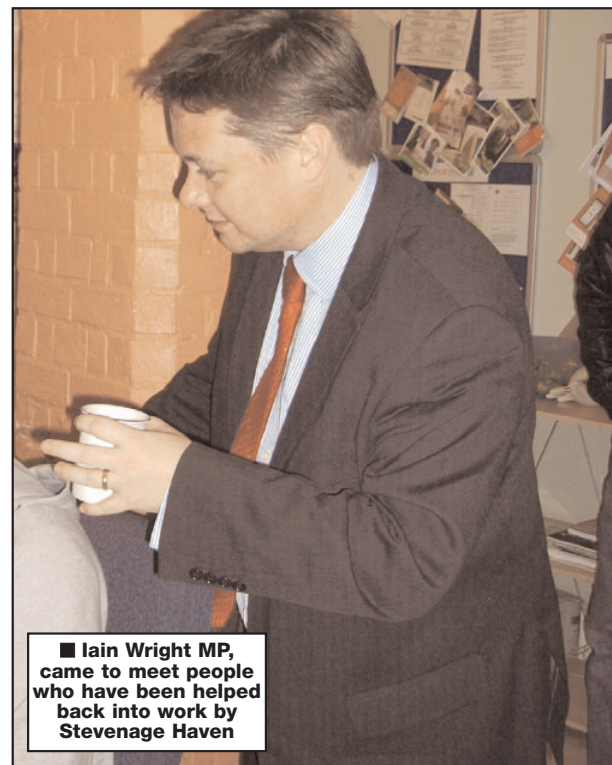
"What I also like is that Stevenage Borough Council employs a proactive strategy to tackling homelessness by finding the underlying causes and trying to mediate with families and provide skills."

Talking about the current recession, Mr Wright said: "It's tough out there but the fundamentals haven't changed. We still need skills in a wide range of areas, and skills and employment are absolutely key to getting out of this recession."

When asked how Comet country's infrastructure will cope with the planned 3,600 homes west of Stevenage, and up to 7,000 east of Luton, Mr Wright said: "I recognise that people are concerned and I think we have to be sensible and ensure any development is well planned."

"The last thing I want to see is a development that doesn't think of the long term future, so that we will have to demolish it in 15 years time because it's not sustainable."

He added: "This is an extremely desirable place to live and affordability is a real issue in this area, so we do need more houses."



■ Iain Wright MP, came to meet people who have been helped back into work by Stevenage Haven

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If you're not sure what you need, just ask the specialists. All Topps Tiles employees attend a rigorous training programme completing 35 product knowledge and customer service courses before becoming permanent members of staff.

Stevenage store manager Danny Fallows has more than 20 years' experience with Topps Tiles. He's a Stevenage local, as is his assistant store manager Simon Lewis who is a new recruit to Topps Tiles.

"I think there's huge potential for us here to offer Stevenage customers our great choice, prices, knowledge and service," Danny said.

"I'm really excited about our new store. You can't get better than Monkwood Retail Park – it's in a central location, easy to find, and has lots of parking. We're also close to many other home improvement stores, so customers can find all their decorating needs in one spot. And it's great that we're opening in my hometown especially in the current economic climate."

In fact, Topps Tiles is pressing ahead with its expansion plans and investment in communities, such as Stevenage, despite the economic downturn. The company already has more than 260 stores nationwide making it Britain's biggest tile and wood flooring specialist.



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