

# RIVER WARD PRESS RELEASE

## *City status – Let's get it back*

Parliamentary hopeful and River Ward Councillor Craig Mackinlay is calling for a renewed effort to regain Rochester's historic City status.

Rochester had City status from 1211 until 1998, with its loss only recognised in 2002 when The City of Rochester Society discovered that Rochester no longer appeared in the Lord Chancellor's list of Cities, President of the Society Bob Radcliffe recalls "It was one of the darkest days for local pride but we continue the battle". A blame game has ensued across the political divide ever since.

Craig Mackinlay, tipped as a front runner to win the Conservative nomination for the Rochester & Strood Parliamentary seat said "It's time for the blame to stop and for all to work together to regain the title that is rightfully ours", and is calling for an online petition on the Council website, petition forms in the next edition of 'Medway Matters' the Council magazine and street petitions to get tens of thousands of signatures to present to the Queen.

The status of 'City' is in the gift of the Crown under an ancient procedure of being granted 'Letters Patent' or open letter from the Monarch declaring to all the status of an area. When a city changes its status the Letters Patent need to be renewed. This renewal was successfully achieved after the City Council of Rochester was abolished in 1974 and in 1979 upon the change to Rochester Upon Medway City Council. Upon the creation of Medway Council as a Unitary authority in 1998, the appropriate form was not lodged and official recognition as a City was lost. It is perfectly possible for Unitary Authorities that take in former Cities to retain City status as has been successfully achieved in both Bath & Hereford, with the creation of a ceremonial board of Charter Trustees to represent the historic City area.

The most recognisable symbol of City status was always the existence of a diocesan Cathedral, which meant a Bishops's chair creating a region for Church administration purposes – a feature that Rochester obviously has. Given the population size and also the Castle, the high population, substantial regeneration and the ongoing application for World Heritage Status for Chatham, Craig Mackinlay says its time for a concerted new effort and asks Labour Parliamentary candidate Teresa Murray to similarly join the campaign.

Cyril Baldwin, Chairman of Rochester's Pickwick Club, founded to support the annual Dickens festivals and to keep the association of Dickens with Rochester alive said "I could never understand why City status was lost, how can we have one of the most impressive castles in the country and a Cathedral and not be called a City?"

The City of Rochester Society are working with the new Mayor Councillor David Carr to find a way through the impasse. Mayor Cllr Carr said "I am taking a keen interest as are other senior members of the Council to put right this dreadful wrong and to regain the prestige of City status that is historically ours."

**Ends**

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