**New info boosts war vet campaign**

A GULF War veteran believes a Freedom of Information request has proved soldiers were given “experimental” vaccines.

Since returning from the 1991 conflict, Andrew Coombes has suffered from a catalogue of illnesses including extreme fatigue, poor short-term memory, muscular and joint pains, gastric problems and skin irritations.

His complaints fall under the umbrella of Gulf War Syndrome, something which one in four veterans are reported to suffer from.

Andrew and many of his comrades believe it is untested vaccines designed to protect them against anthrax, which were administered ahead of their deployment, causing their ill health.

They say documents released by the Ministry of Defence show soldiers were test subjects, and what the long-term implications of the different vaccines would be were not known.

Andrew, from Elmdon Road, South Ockendon, said: “This Freedom of Information request is the first time, we believe, the MOD has admitted it was using us as experimental groups.”

The document refers to a study reviewed soldiers were given the anthrax vaccine and a whooping cough vaccine.

Tests on animals showed mixing the two drugs could boost the strength of the anthrax virus. Some soldiers were given both vaccines, while others just received the anthrax virus.

Andrew said: “Around 53,000 people from the UK went to the Gulf and many are suffering from ill health as a result.

“When they started doing the vaccinations, they didn’t know what the response was going to be.

“The study groups had different vaccinations, at different times and in different combinations.

“We were gobsmacked by the report when we saw it. We don’t want compensation, we just want it to be recognised by the MOD.”

A spokesman from the MOD said a research programme into the vaccines showed it would not have had adverse effects on a soldier’s health.

He said: “The MOD sponsored a research programme into the vaccines and tablets that were given to troops at the time of the 1990/1991 Gulf conflict to protect them against the threat of biological and chemical warfare.

“The overwhelming evidence from the programme is that the combination of vaccines and tablets that were offered to UK Forces at the time of the 1990/1991 Gulf conflict would not have had adverse health effects.”

Thurrock MP Jackie Doyle-Price said she will be speaking to ministers about the FOI.

She said: “I think there are questions for the MOD about the vaccination programme and about how our veterans are being supported and I am taking these up with ministers.”

**Tell the council online**

A SURVEY on the regeneration of Thurrock has been launched online.

Thurrock Council wants to know what residents want the future of Thurrock to look like and what they think the council’s priorities should be.

The Setting Priorities for Thurrock consultation will be available on the council’s website until June 10 as well as in Thurrock’s libraries and housing offices.

Council leader John Kent said: “This is an exciting time to live and work in Thurrock, a time when years of behind-the-scenes work is starting to bear fruit with thousands of new jobs, new homes and new prospects.

“Thurrock Council wants to ensure this regeneration is completed in a way which improves the lives of local people and targets their needs.

“This questionnaire has been constructed to help ensure people living in Thurrock will be able to tell the council their concerns and their hopes for the future.”

Everyone who takes part will have the option to enter a draw with three prizes of Lakeside Shopping Centre vouchers.

Visit www.thurrock.gov.uk/consultation

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**Things are looking up says JDP**

THURROCK’s MP has spoken of a positive future for the borough in a contribution to a debate on jobs in the House of Commons.

Addressing fellow MPs last Thursday, Jackie Doyle-Price spoke of the thousands of jobs on the horizon in Thurrock.

She added, though, that with the growth of jobs comes the need to invest in the road network.

Ms Doyle-Price said: “The simple fact is that deficit reduction and the pursuit of growth are not mutually exclusive, indeed, we lay the foundations for lasting growth when we go back to living within our means.

“Jobs and growth rely on investment by individuals and businesses, not on Government spending.”

Ms Doyle-Price added investment in Thurrock is set to provide new jobs, with the expansion of Lakeside Shopping Centre, the new London Gateway port and the expansion of Tilbury Port, which could mean a further 10,000 jobs.

She added: “Within this decade, more cargo will be landed in Thurrock than anywhere else in the country. However, we will need capacity in the road network.

“We are finally looking at designing and working up proposals to improve junction 30 of the M25.”

That single project alone will unlock so much economic capacity in south Essex.”

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