

Huw Merriman Newsletter 20 May 2022

Dear Resident,

Welcome to the latest newsletter and a warm welcome to Artem, who I met last week, and many other Ukrainian refugees who are new to our community. Over the last two months, I've spent hours of my time with Home Office officials in the hub in Parliament on Ukrainian visa issues. Often, it's a matter of completing missing details or connecting all parties. It was wonderful to meet the human element to our work when talking to Artem. His school, and the community are providing a warm welcome. Frances, my office manager, has been visiting our local hubs to explain our role in the process. The rest of my team have also been queuing and chasing for visa application completions. This comes on top of the existing work, so I hope you will be understanding. Even if you are not sponsoring a refugee, there's plenty you can do to get involved. Contact your nearest Parish or Town Council or drop me a line.

With best wishes,

Huw

Heathfield Community College Parliament visit

Last month, I welcomed a group of Sixth Form students from Heathfield Community College to Parliament. Following their tour of the Palace of Westminster, I answered some of their questions on support for Ukrainian refugees and other humanitarian situations across the globe.

Launch of Maritime 2050 Transport Select Committee Inquiry

Earlier this month, the Transport Select Committee launched our Maritime 2050 inquiry. The Government's Maritime 2050 paper sets out their vision and ambitions for the future of our maritime sector. Our inquiry seeks to examine how effective the Government's proposals will be.

You can watch our first evidence session [here](#).

Southern Rail Meeting

With changes to local train times coming into force this month, my constituency neighbour, Hastings and Rye MP Sally-Ann Hart, and I met with Southern Rail. We have asked Southern to work with our great local rail user groups to ensure we are getting the maximum service from the resources available.

Barriers to Accessibility Roundtable

Earlier this month, I spoke at a roundtable on how we can deliver safer walking spaces for pedestrians, which was hosted by my colleague and neighbouring MP Caroline Ansell. The role of e-scooters was a particular concern that was raised. Though controversial, I am supportive of legalising the use of e-scooters as a means to ensure that their usage is properly regulated.

Queen's Speech

Earlier this month, Prince Charles came to Parliament, representing the Queen, for this year's State Opening. The Queen's Speech set out the Government's legislative agenda for the year. Of the many future Bills announced, I will particularly be focusing on proposals to reform our planning and development rules which are of such importance in our local area.

To find out more about this year's Queen's Speech, click [here](#).

Dementia Action Week

To mark Dementia Action Week, I visited the Dementia Diagnostics Hub in Parliament on Wednesday to talk to people affected by dementia and clinicians who are involved in diagnosing dementia. Locally, we have the second highest number of people living with dementia in the country, and this was a useful opportunity to learn more about how we can better serve people affected by this terrible disease, particularly ahead of the upcoming refresh of the National Dementia Strategy. I have been asked to feed in to the strategy by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. If any constituents have their own ideas, please do let me know at huw.merriman.mp@parliament.uk

Transport Questions

Yesterday, during Transport Questions, I asked the Minister whether he would work with colleagues across Government to bring about fresh legislation to better protect maritime workers and ensure that the law breaking of P&O Ferries can never be repeated.

You can watch my question and the Minister's response [here](#).

Sussex Resilience Forum

I, along with Sussex MP colleagues, this week wrote to the Sussex Resilience Forum regarding our local ability to manage emergency events, notably the COVID response and recent weather events.

To read our full letter, visit [here](#)

Meeting with the Rail Minister

After the Easter recess, I met with the Rail Minister, Wendy Morton, to discuss upcoming reforms to our railways designed to ensure vital services remain sustainable in the years to come.

First evidence session in Transport Select Committee's Bus Strategy inquiry

This month, the Transport Select Committee held our first evidence session in our National Bus Strategy inquiry. East Sussex was recently awarded over £40 million to improve local services as part of the strategy, and our inquiry will look into the impact of the strategy nationally.

Storm Eunice: Network Rail Meeting

Following the devastating impact of Storm Eunice earlier this year, I met with Network Rail to discuss how we can improve resilience on the railway during spells of severe weather.

BBC and Autism APPG AGMs

As many of you know, I Chair both the Autism and BBC All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs). Last week we held our annual AGMs where we discussed the work we have undertaken over the past 12 months, our future plans, and elected officers for the coming year.

Green Alliance Roundtable

Last Thursday, I spoke at a roundtable event on decarbonising the aviation sector, hosted by the environmental think tank Green Alliance. The event looked at the potential of Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF), which come from feedstock sources such as oils from plants, and have the potential to reduce carbon emissions in aviation by 80%. This was a good opportunity to discuss the work the Transport Committee has done in this important area.

You can watch the roundtable [here](#).

Water Safety Education Meeting

This month I met with a water safety campaigner to discuss how we can better educate people on the importance of staying safe in and around water. This is particularly important locally as in 2020 we had the second highest water fatality rate in the country. I am aiming to bring the water safety team down to Bexhill beach so we can teach school pupils how they can be safe in the sea.

Levelling Up Questions on Planning Reform

On Monday, during Levelling Up Questions, I challenged the Government to be more ambitious about planning reform. Wealden and Rother District Councils have to find more and more land for development despite there being 10,000 permissions granted but not built out. We need to deliver on land allocated before even more gets banked by developers.

More detail along with my question and the Minister's answer can be viewed [here](#).

Transport Debate

Yesterday, the House of Commons held a debate in the name of the Prime Minister on transport. The Government set out its intention in the Queen's Speech to introduce a Transport Bill this year. During the debate, I set out some of the challenges and opportunities facing the different transport sectors and where the Government should focus its attention.

My full speech can be found [here](#).

Southern Water Meeting

In April, Sally-Ann Hart and I held our second meeting with the Chief Executive of Southern Water. Once again, the quality of our bathing water was a key issue. The solution to improving bathing water does not only lie with them as other pollutants enter our waterways and the sea so I will be working with all relevant agencies to establish the source so that we can achieve the goal of good bathing water quality 365 days of the year.

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service

A meeting with the East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service for MPs provided a helpful update on the financial position of the service, their service priorities which include reducing risk and their community engagement. ESFRS are also involved in the Homes for Ukraine scheme for which they are carrying out home safety checks for hosts and providing advice. Legislation changes through the Fire Safety Act and Building Safety Act because of Grenfell means that the local fire and rescue service now has a greater role in building inspection which needs resourcing. East Sussex has a disproportionately large number of high-rise blocks compared to other areas outside of London.

Crowhurst Parish Council

I met with the Crowhurst parish council team to discuss local issues and offer any assistance. This hard-working team has a very strong environmental commitment, and I was interested to see so many new and dedicated wildflower areas in the village. We discussed the resilience of their power supply as many were cut off during Storm Eunice and the possibilities of a community energy project. We also discussed the hazards of being able to walk through the village which has so little footpath, this is especially challenging for parents wishing to walk their children to the village school.

Heathfield Community College

The school council wrote to me asking what the UK is doing to welcome Ukrainian refugees and deliver support to the Ukrainian war effort. To answer, I came into the college and we spent 90 minutes discussing a wide range of domestic and foreign choices and issues. It's always good to spend time with our local schools and discuss issues with pupils. It's right that we debate the choices which are available and the consequences of our actions.

BT Digital Rollout

In my last newsletter, I mentioned that I had held a meeting with BT about the rollout of digital phones lines as I was concerned about the resilience of the new phone system. Many constituents still rely on their landlines as their main form of communication. Those who had switched over to BT Digital from their analogue phones found they lost their services during Storm Eunice as the internet and power were down. I am pleased to report that BT have now acknowledged the lack of resilience in their system and have paused the rollout until these issues are addressed. You can read more [here](#).

Protection for Retail Workers

Last year, I campaigned for greater protection for shop workers from abuse and assault by bringing forward a Private Members Bill. The Bill did not proceed as the government agreed to incorporate my call for stronger sentencing into the Police, Crime and Sentencing Bill which received Royal Assent in April. This now means that retail workers will receive the same protections from abuse in law as our emergency service workers.

Northern Rother Parishes Meeting

It was great to meet representatives from many of our Parish Councils to talk about planning reforms and their ideas for legislative change. A big thank you to all of our Parish and Town Councillors for all of the help and advice they provide.

Heathfield Surgery

I was pleased to be in Heathfield for a surgery with constituents. It is good to be meeting people face to face again to discuss issues which are important to them and their local communities. Thank you to the Heathfield and Waldron parish council team for their help in organising it.

Selling Off Social Housing

I'm alarmed at the news that social housing stock in many villages is being sold by Optivo on the private market (not to tenants). We have a shortage as it is. I've met with Optivo and understand that some property revamps, required to bring the homes up to the latest rental and energy standards, are more costly than starting anew. I've asked them to consider only disposing of homes when they are building new stock in the same village. I've spoken with the Housing Minister and will pursue further with him if Optivo do not change tack. Whilst meeting with Optivo, I asked for housing officers to ensure they spend more time on the ground helping their tenants and ensuring that any anti-social activity is swiftly dealt with. Maintenance is being brought in-house, which should help to improve the properties for tenants waiting for repairs.

St George's Day Service, Chichester

I was honoured to be invited to the Royal Sussex Regiment's 100th St George's Day service at Chichester Cathedral. This annual service honours those who gave their lives in the Great War and remembers those whose names are recorded on the memorial panels within the Chapel.

Local Business Visit

In Crowhurst, I visit the factory and HQ of SUDwell, a company which is making environmentally friendly paving from recycled UPVC window frames, plastics and rubber which is also permeable and long-lasting. This company is ready for expansion as its product has generated huge interest from major businesses, I am looking to see how I can help them.

NetMAGmedia, Heathfield

I was pleased to meet the team at NetMAGmedia in Heathfield - an award-winning company which publishes several trade magazines in the house-building sector. They have come back even stronger following a difficult time during Covid and are innovating with new ways of reaching their audience.

Bexhill Choral Society Concert

Congratulations to the many talented singers who lit up the De La Warr Pavilion with a wonderful evening of music. An amazing evening was made even more special with the tribute to their late President, and a true friend, Brian Kentfield. It was lovely to watch and listen in the company of Brian's family.

'Here to Hear' - Deaf Awareness Event

A lovely Saturday morning visit with my neighbour, Sally-Ann Hart MP, to promote Deaf Awareness. Thanks to our good friend, Hannah Fisher, and her team, we got to try lots of amazing new technologies which are helping more people to engage. Well done to all of the brilliant people we met at the stand in Bexhill.

Eco Churches Award

I was delighted to attend a celebration event at the rural church of St Mary the Virgin in Ticehurst, East Sussex, which has become the first in Chichester Diocese to gain the prestigious Eco Church Gold Award. A huge amount of effort and commitment has gone into achieving this award so congratulations to the team who were presented with their plaque and certificate by the Bishop of Lewes.

Observer Article

In my latest column for the Bexhill and Battle Observer, I discuss the challenges for our economy which will be much of the focus of the new Parliamentary year. You can read more [here](#).