



Oliver Dowden CBE MP

Member of Parliament for Hertsmere

End of Term Report – Summer 2017



I was honoured and delighted to be re-elected as Hertsmere's Member of Parliament this year. I want to thank the people of Hertsmere for the continued support they have shown me.

As some of you may also have seen, it was an honour to be appointed Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon MP, in the Government re-shuffle. Members of Parliament have to juggle multiple responsibilities. These include advocating for your constituents, scrutinising the Government, but also playing your part in national decisions. As part of that third element, I look forward to working with Sir Michael and supporting him in the vital task of sustaining our world class armed forces and keeping our country safe.



My new duties will absolutely not however, distract from my campaigning priorities in Hertsmere and I will continue to work to protect and enhance what makes our area such a special place to live.

Nationally, the general election result was of course disappointing. There are many lessons for the Conservative Party to learn, but the immediate challenge for our country is provide a stable government which is essential for us to start tackling many of the challenges that we face as a nation. These include achieving an effective Brexit deal, countering rising threats to our national security and managing the economy through a difficult period. As I seek to address these challenges I will, as ever, be guided by the people of Hertsmere.

I have continued to work on the following priorities:

On Local Infrastructure

I was very pleased last year to have secured a commitment from the Government and TfL that contactless Oyster technology will be extended to Potters Bar and Bushey by the end of 2018. I am monitoring work on this closely and I recently met with the Transport Secretary to receive an update on the progress. He assured me that the work is on track for the system to be delivered on time so that commuters will soon be able to use one card to tap in and travel from Potters Bar and Radlett throughout London.



I know that Thameslink continues to underperform. I made a speech on this in Parliament during a debate on the line's performance this month. I used the opportunity to press the Rail Minister to push both Govia and Network Rail to address the ongoing problems that cause such misery for commuters every day. I will also be organising another public meeting with both Govia and Network Rail executives later this year so that commuters can raise their concerns directly with them. To watch my speech and the Minister's response, please follow this link: <https://goo.gl/rpLis9>.



Like many others, I was very concerned to hear the news of the planned closure of Nascot Lawn Respite Centre. I recently met with some of the parents affected at my constituency surgery who talked to me about their children and the help that Nascot Lawn gives them. They are extremely worried by the lack of other respite services in the county that can provide an equivalent standard of care. In light of this, I have been in contact with Herts Valley Clinical Commissioning Group urging them to have a moratorium on the decision to address these points and reconsider it in light of the very significant concerns of those affected. I

have also urged the CCG and the County Council to meet directly with parents and I am doing the same. In a speech in Parliament in June, I raised the issue of how we provide more houses for our children and grandchildren, but also how we protect our green belt and get the infrastructure we need, particularly in Borehamwood. This is a crucial issue, especially as Hertsmere Borough Council is currently continuing the process of developing its new Local Plan which will shape development in our area over the next few decades. I know this is important to many of you and I will continue to make sure that the voices of local residents are heard in this process. To watch the speech, please follow this link: <https://goo.gl/wVFSx3>

On Education

One of the other issues many people are concerned about at the moment is funding for schools. I know from my own experience, meetings with teachers and the correspondence I receive, the pressures on schools. I continue to highlight these concerns with Ministers and make the wider case for prioritising resources to education so that we can invest in our children and grandchildren's future.



As a first step I was pleased that the Government has committed to an extra £1.3 billion of funding for schools, on top of the increases made in 2015. Core funding for schools will now rise from nearly £41 billion in 2017-18 to £42.4 billion in 2018-19, and to £43.5 billion in 2019-20. This represents an increase of £2.6 billion between this year and 2019-20, and as a result funding per pupil will be maintained in real terms over the next two years.



I am also aware of the issue about the provision of primary school places in Potters Bar. I raised this earlier in the year with the County Council and I am meeting with them soon to discuss in more detail what action needs to be taken. If the problem persists I will be pushing for a new primary school to serve Potters Bar.

I've thoroughly enjoyed visiting many of our area's schools over the last few months, including St Teresa's School in Borehamwood to see their new nature centre and join in with the celebrations for its opening. I was pleased to have played my part in securing this by pushing for an extra financial commitment from the developers.

It was also a pleasure to visit St Nicholas' School in Elstree, another one of our great local schools, especially as it followed a meeting with them during their guided tour of Parliament earlier this year. I enjoyed the session answering the pupils' questions about Parliament and my work over the last two years as Hertsmere's MP. I equally welcomed the chance to talk with the Headteacher, Governors and staff from St Nicholas' about the wider issues they are facing at the moment and we discussed a number of topics.



Lastly, it was excellent to receive the news from the Department for Education that Dame Alice Owen's has been granted funding through the Government's Condition Improvement Fund for a new school building. I've supported this application and am glad that all our efforts have come to fruition. The school will now finally be able to replace the existing block and provide new facilities for its students.

On Defending our Green Open Spaces

I am continuing my campaign against the proposed Radlett rail freight terminal, which if built would be a horrendous blight on our countryside and I have been pursuing this fight on two fronts.

First, while I would always rather that this green belt land remain untouched, given that planning permission for a rail freight terminal has been secured, I believe we should also consider bids for much needed new homes. There have been a number of developments regarding this over the past few months, most importantly the rejection of St Albans' Draft Local Plan by the Planning Inspector and the High Court. I hope that the High Court's decision will provide an opportunity for the Council to look again at its housing policy. In particular, to meet the housing targets set by the

Government, St Albans will need to consider additional sites for housing and conduct a full green belt review to identify these.

One of the sites that I believe must be included within such a review is the proposed site of the freight terminal, given that outline planning permission has already been granted for this in spite of the existing green belt status. As I established in Parliamentary Questions and a meeting with Cllr Campbell and the Planning Minister earlier this year, extant planning permission on a green belt site for nationally significant infrastructure does not preclude it being included as part of a green belt review and subsequently made available for alternative bids, such as housing.

Alongside this, ahead of the General Election, I wrote to the Leader of Hertfordshire County Council, Cllr Rob Gordon, warning him not to sell off the County Council's section of the land to the rail freight developers, Helioslough. It's important that the County Council do not move with any undue haste at a time when there is so much uncertainty around the St Albans Local Plan. I do not believe the County Council are required by a fiduciary duty to sell the site. However, if the land must be sold, I believe that the proper discharge of this fiduciary duty would require the Council to consider the greatly increased potential value of the land for housing should its green belt designation be altered. I have therefore now strongly urged Cllr Gordon not to make any decision on a sale until after the process of drafting St Albans' Local Plan is complete and final plans for housing numbers are clear.



Second, in the event these efforts are not successful, we must unfortunately take steps to minimise the impact of the terminal if it is built. I was very concerned to hear from my meeting with Network Rail about the potential for disruption to passengers on Thameslink resulting from Helioslough's plans. The works required to make any terminal functional are extensive and much of it cannot be accomplished while the main line is operating.



I know that commuters in Hertsmere remain deeply frustrated with the poor level of service offered by Thameslink. Alongside my ongoing concerns over how any additional freight on an already busy line will be accommodated, I fear the effect on commuters of building works on the line will be serious. Should Helioslough succeed in acquiring this green belt land and moving this project forward I will be demanding Network Rail make sure they prioritise long suffering commuters rather than construction of this unnecessary and disruptive freight terminal.

I have raised this directly with the Transport Secretary who has undertaken to investigate personally whether adequate planning has been done.

Westminster News

During the debate on the Queen's Speech, I made the point to the Prime Minister about the need for cross-party co-operation to fight extremism in our country. Her proposal of a commissioner for extremism requires the engagement not just of Government Members but of Opposition Members, if we are to stamp out the evil ideology of extremism that drives terrorism in this country.



We had an interesting debate in the House of Commons in July on Israel and Palestine. A number of people had been in contact with me about the flying of the Hezbollah flag at the recent Al Quds rally and I raised this directly with the Foreign Office Minister responsible for the Middle East, Alistair Burt MP, in the debate. Later I also pressed the Shadow Foreign Secretary on her Leader's troubling relationship with groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah. Rest assured I will continue to raise the concerns of my constituents on these issues.

The process of exiting the European Union continues. In this session the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill was introduced. This will formally repeal our membership of the European Union and transfer the body of existing European Union law into our law so that we do not face a cliff edge with exit. The proposals outlined in the legislation will be scrutinised in extensive debate, beginning when

we return in September. I of course will play my part to make sure the voices of my constituents are properly heard in Parliament.

Finally, I was also pleased to be re-elected as co-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for British Jews.

Out and about in Hertsmere

As ever, I've been out and about across Hertsmere in the last few months and here's a few photos for you from those visits and the 2017 campaign trail:



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Come to one of my surgeries: In Borehamwood, Bushey, Potters Bar or Radlett. Please contact my office on 020 7219 3415 to make an appointment.