



Oliver Dowden CBE MP

Member of Parliament for Hertsmere

End of Term Report – Winter 2017



It has been an exceptionally busy time in Westminster over the last few months and in my latest End of Term Report I wanted to take the chance to update you on my work on your behalf both locally and nationally. It would be impossible to cover everything in a document of this length, so this report aims to give a few selected highlights. If there are any other issues you would like an update on please do email me and I would be happy to provide a personal response.

Parliament has faced some crucial decisions, in particular over the process for leaving the European Union. As ever, I have been active in the discussions, seeking to represent the people of Hertsmere. Discussions have focussed on the EU Withdrawal Bill. It essentially takes EU legislation and puts it into British law so that we do not have the cliff edge of no legal framework when we leave. I support it as an essential part of our smooth exit from the EU. Alongside this, the Prime Minister has made real progress in agreeing the terms of our withdrawal and now that phase two is starting we can begin the process of agreeing a good trade deal.

On a lighter note, every year I send hundreds of Christmas cards to local people and community organisations. This year, I wanted my Christmas card to be designed by our local children to reflect their creative skills and I held a competition to find the best one. The winner was Amy Juttla, from Bushey, whose wonderfully warm and festive design is pictured above. Amy received 100 cards with her design as a prize and I know it will be enjoyed by all my friends, family and colleagues receiving them.

I have continued to work on the following local priorities:

On Improving our Infrastructure

Our rail services remain one of my key areas of work. In early December I met with the Rail Minister to discuss the new national rail strategy and the proposed break-up of the GTR franchise into separate Thameslink, Great Northern and Southern lines. I was pleased to hear that the Government will be consulting on different options to improve services. These include integrating track and train so that organisations running our railways cannot pass the buck when things go wrong; looking to separate London area commuter services from longer distance services to the rest of the country; and whether organisations such as TfL should be invited to bid for the franchises.



As a commuter on Thameslink, I know first-hand how bad the service has been for passengers in recent years. I organised a second public meeting with executives from Thameslink and Network Rail. There were a number of commitments to improvements which have now been delivered, including fixing the new Class 700 trains' air conditioning and making sure passenger information screens update quickly and accurately. In the longer run we also need to secure the next phase of infrastructure investment once the Thameslink upgrade is complete so the line can continue to cope with rising demand. I will therefore be meeting with Network Rail, Govia and Government transport officials in the New Year to discuss what work needs to be done to secure this investment. I will be monitoring progress closely on your behalf.

Similarly, I continue to monitor progress on delivering Oyster to Potters Bar and Radlett by the end of the coming year, the commitment to which I secured from the Government in 2016. In November I wrote to the Rail Minister with Grant Shapps MP to request an update. I was very disappointed to hear that there are now doubts about whether the project

will be completed on time. We have requested an urgent meeting with the Minister to find out more and press him to ensure that the 2018 commitment is honoured.

On healthcare, like many others I was very concerned by reports that Potters Bar Community Hospital's future may be in question. It was important to speak directly with the agencies responsible and I am pleased to have secured clarity from Herts Valley CCG, the Royal Free and Herts Community NHS Trust that the Hospital will be remaining open. The Hospital is a wonderful asset for the town and I was able to see this first hand during a recent visit. I am grateful to all the staff for their hospitality on the day and their dedicated work helping their patients. I hope that people can now feel reassured that the hospital will be remaining open.



Improving access to GP facilities in Borehamwood as the town expands is also priority for me. I have now met with both Herts Valley CCG and the Royal Free, and I pressed them on this issue. The CCG assured me that they are developing plans for a new healthcare hub in the town that will include GP facilities. In addition they are examining new measures to increase the capacity of local health services by encouraging existing surgeries to share resources and expertise. I was also encouraged to hear that they will be working closely with Hertsmere Borough Council on the updated Local Plan.

On Education

I believe we need a new secondary school to serve our area, especially around Radlett and Bushey. Before Christmas I met with the Borough Council, the County Council and the Regional School Commissioner to discuss this. We made good progress on identifying the demand and funding for the project. The next step will be to find a specific site in the updated Local Plan and I will be working to bring together all three parties to achieve this in the coming months.



We also discussed primary school places in Potters Bar. I know this is an issue that has concerned parents over the last year. The County Council informed me that despite the increase in applications, there is currently still an overall surplus of places in the town. However, they are fully aware of the higher pressure and demand at a specific number of schools and are keeping the situation under review. If demand in Potters Bar continues to rise, they will take action to address this, including the possibility of opening a new primary school to serve the town.

Nationally I continue to make the case for more funding and school places in Hertsmere, particularly as we build more homes. I am pleased to see that progress has been made and that under the Government's new plans all Hertsmere's schools will now see a budget increase. I have said many times before, the excellent state education I received gave me the very best start in life. I am pleased that the Government has listened to arguments made by myself and others and committed to this additional investment. However, I know from my own experience, meetings with teachers and the correspondence I receive, the ongoing pressures on schools. I will continue to make the case for prioritising resources to education so that we can invest in our children and grandchildren's future.



I have very much enjoyed visiting many of our local schools in the past few months including, Mount Grace, Queens', Shenley Primary and Yavneh to name just a few. Thanks to all the schools for their warm welcomes.

On Defending our Green Open Spaces

One of the major issues that people raise with me is the importance of protecting our Green Belt and improving infrastructure, something I have pressed the Government over consistently. I am therefore pleased the Chancellor listened to arguments made by myself and others and that the Autumn Budget recommits to the Green Belt as well as providing additional resources for infrastructure.

Hertsmere Borough Council are currently in the process of drawing up the Borough's updated Local Plan, a document which will shape development in our area for decades to come. One of the great pleasures of living in our part of Hertfordshire is the countryside we have right on our doorstep. It makes our towns and villages distinct and special places to live and this is something we must preserve. However, we must also make sure we provide more houses for our children and grandchildren so that they too can enjoy the chance to own their own home.



The latest stage of this process was published in October, setting out in more detail the broad options being considered, and in December I met with the Borough Council's Planning Department to discuss this.

The next stage will be the 'Preferred Options' report in the New Year and ahead of this I have been keeping in touch with residents groups from across the Borough to better understand their concerns. While as an MP I have no direct control over local planning decisions, I will continue to ensure that the voices of my constituents are heard in this process. In particular, in my response to the consultation in November and in my meetings, I urged the Council to make sure

that they include appropriate infrastructure to match any new housing within their proposals, and pledged to work with them to help achieve that.

With the publication of the new, increased housing need figures for St Albans by the Government and the decision by the High Court to reject St Albans Council's original Local Plan, it is clear that they need to consider new sites for homes. One of the sites that must be included within such a review is the proposed site of the Radlett freight terminal, given that planning permission has already been granted for this in spite of its green belt status.



I have always said I do not want any development of this green belt land. But if it must be developed, it is ludicrous that the land can have planning permission for a rail freight terminal on it, but bids for desperately needed homes cannot be considered. The Council must now consider this in order both to provide our community with those much needed new homes and to prevent the construction of an unnecessary freight terminal that would blight our countryside. I met again with with St Albans to make this point in November.



Finally, it is often the smaller things that can make a big difference to local life and I am very pleased that following my intervention with BT, South Mimms' and Ridge's red phone boxes have been repaired and restored. I am very glad to have been able to help restore these as they are such a wonderful feature of our country landscape here in Hertsmere.

In Westminster

I am delighted to have joined the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme this year. This scheme allows MPs to see first-hand what the Forces are doing to defend our country, especially vital in my role as the Defence Secretary's Parliamentary Private Secretary. We all owe a debt of gratitude to the tremendous dedication shown everyday around the world by our servicemen and women.



In Westminster itself, I have made a number of speeches in the last term on topics ranging from our country's economic productivity and our future relationship with the EU, to protecting animal welfare standards and improving mental health services. To read or watch all my contributions in the House, please do visit Hansard online or Parliament Live TV.

Lastly, I have met with the Foreign Secretary to discuss the ongoing detention of Kamal Foroughi, a British-Iranian dual national, in Evin Prison in Iran. I will continue to support my constituent, Kamal's son Kamran, in his campaign to free his father.

Out and about in Hertsmere

As ever, I have been all over our Borough in the past few months, visiting local business, schools and community groups. Highlights were nominating The Three Horseshoes and their chefs for the Parliamentary Pub Chef of Year Award and doing the 'Wheelchair Challenge' in Borehamwood. I've included a few of the photos below:



*Lastly, Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year!*



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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.