



Meeting one of the youngest Ukrainian refugees, born in the UK after her mother and brother fled the bombing in Ukraine

Support for Ukrainian Refugees

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February last year saw many local people sign up to the Government's Homes for Ukraine scheme – working with our local councils to offer sanctuary to those fleeing the war.

My staff and I worked with the Home Office to ensure visas were issued as fast as possible to those travelling from Ukraine to the UK.

I was incredibly impressed by the way in which my constituents advocated on behalf of people they had never met, to assist their passage to the UK and to welcome them into their homes. This year I have been talking to some of them to hear how the process has worked for them and to learn what improvements can be made.

One sponsor I met went above and beyond when she became the birthing partner for her guest, who had travelled from Ukraine in the early stages of pregnancy and then delivered a beautiful baby girl in Essex just before Christmas.

I want to thank everyone who has taken in a family in need and those who have made Homes for Ukraine a success, particularly the staff at Epping Forest District, Brentwood Borough and Essex County Councils. ■

Local charities rallied to help those left in Ukraine



Improving Our High Streets and Town Centres

There's good news on progress in my campaign to stop massive lorries using Ongar as a cut through.

Travelling at speed, huge HGVs are a threat to pedestrians and historic buildings – particularly around Ongar's narrow pinch point. After years of evidence gathering and with the support of local businessmen and councillor, Jaymey McIvor, formal approaches have been made to Google and Waze by Cllr Lee Scott, the Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Highways, to remove Ongar High Street from HGV satnav systems. This action should swiftly reduce the number of over-sized trucks having such an adverse impact on our historic High Street.

I have also been pleased to give my support to plans drawn up by Brentwood Borough and Epping Forest District Councils to bring new investment into our local High Streets through the Government's

UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Brentwood's Conservative team is pressing ahead with proposals to bring a high-end cinema to the Baytree Centre – and I know many families, just like mine, will be thrilled to be able to see the latest films locally.

The way we work has changed since Covid and I've been very impressed how local businesses (like the Spread Eagle in Brentwood, pictured), are making the most of new trade from those now working from home and able to socialise locally again. Here's to a better year for business, post pandemic. ■



Huge lorries should become a thing of the past on Ongar's historic High Street



Pulling a pint in the newly refurbished Spread Eagle Pub in Brentwood

Protecting Brentwood and Ongar's Countryside

There is understandable anger at the unauthorised development that has taken place on some parts of our beautiful countryside.

It is entirely unacceptable that some people should build on our green belt without permission and I have been working closely with Brentwood Borough Council, Epping Forest District Council and the parishes to ensure that action is taken to stop and reverse this.

Brentwood Borough Council have been fighting a lengthy court battle to see that justice is done – but the process has shown me that the current law makes it far too difficult and expensive for local authorities to intervene. This is why I've taken the concerns of residents in Warley and Navestock to the attention of the Secretary of State and Ministers in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Michael Gove. I am reassured the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill will strengthen planning enforcement and that fines for certain planning breaches will be increased. But I shall be monitoring things closely to see if further changes to the law are needed. ■



Meeting the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, the Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP, to discuss the huge cost to local councils in tackling unauthorised development in the green belt

Procuring New Opportunities for Jobs and Business

In October I was honoured when the Prime Minister asked me to become the Parliamentary Secretary in the Cabinet Office.

The Cabinet Office is one of the centres of Government which brings together other departments and central government functions.

One of my major tasks has been to take the Government's Procurement Bill through the Commons. Now we are outside the EU it is possible for us to improve the previously cumbersome procurement rules to ensure that the £300bn we spend on procurement is spent better for taxpayers, public authorities, and British business. Crucially, as part of this work, we're making it easier for small and medium sized businesses to bid for public sector contracts – creating new opportunities for local suppliers to get work without being squeezed out by large firms. ■



At the Cabinet Office, preparing for a Procurement Bill debate

Reducing Crime and Strengthening Essex Police

Thanks to huge investment by the Government and strong leadership by local Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Roger Hirst, Essex Police is now the biggest and strongest it has ever been in its 182-year history.

As I discussed recently with local police, this commitment is already making a difference with incidents of burglary down by 49 per cent, anti-social behaviour down by 55 per cent and theft by 3 per cent since 2016. This is an excellent start – and I will continue to work with Roger to make sure we get even more officers in our community and on our streets. ■



Tackling rural crime in the villages around Brentwood and Ongar



Discussing the impact of investment in policing with Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Roger Hirst

Cutting NHS Waiting Times

Following Covid and one of the biggest ever winter surges in the NHS, the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary are taking decisive action to cut waiting times.

They are investing £200m to make more care home beds available to enable those who are no longer in need of hospital treatment to be discharged.

Locally, I have heard how Brentwood Community Hospital has been doing amazing work with its frailty unit for older people which has eased pressure on our large acute hospitals in Romford, Basildon and Chelmsford.

I met East of England Ambulance Service Trust's Chief Executive, Tom Abell, to discuss ambulance response times and was pleased to hear how response times for the most serious incidents in south west Essex improved during January 2023.

Many constituents have told me access to GP appointments is an ongoing concern. Ongar Health Centre is making improvements by reorganising its reception rotas and recruiting two more GPs. Similar actions are being taken in GP practices across the constituency to ensure patients have access to the advice and treatments they need. But if you feel you are receiving a poor service, please do get in touch.

It was also a pleasure to visit the wonderful Essex and Herts Air Ambulance team at their new base at North Weald Airfield. The helicopter pilots, medics and equipment there are second to none – we are very fortunate to have them serving the local area. ■



Discussing ambulance response times with East of England Ambulance Service Trust CEO, Tom Abell



Meeting Ongar Health Centre's team to hear about improvements to booking appointments



Visiting the Essex and Herts Air Ambulance at its North Weald Airfield Base

21st Century Library Coming To Shenfield

It's excellent news that work is well underway on the development on the library site in the centre of Shenfield.

The new building, developed through Essex County Council's housing development company, Essex Homes, is a great use of the space, with nine high-quality apartments helping to fund the construction of a modern library fit for the 21st century.

As an enthusiastic reader, and a keen user of local library services with my family, I am very much looking forward to the new library opening for business. ■



Backing Business and Skills

The Prime Minister's pledges to grow the economy to create better-paid jobs and opportunities will have a direct impact on local employers and employees.

Locally I have been talking to childcare providers about what they need to be able to provide parents in work with affordable childcare. Getting this right is vital for all sorts of businesses.

My visit to see Lesley Seville, who runs Scribbles Day Nursery in North Weald and her staff, was very helpful in showing me some of the pressures the profession is under and since then I have been talking to ministers in the Department for Education about changes we can make to improve recruitment and retention of those working in childcare. ■



With Lesley Seville and Danielle Martin at Scribbles Day Nursery in North Weald.

Backing Residents Against the Pylons



Joining fellow Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk MPs to meet Energy Security and Net Zero Minister, the Rt. Hon. Graham Stuart MP

Almost a hundred Ingatestone residents attended a meeting I organised recently to discuss National Grid's plans to build a chain of colossal pylons from Norfolk to Tilbury, cutting through countryside around Ingatestone, Hutton and Dunton.

As I said to all those who attended, I am strongly opposed to the plans and have been sure to let Ministers know the strength of the feeling in the community. My thanks to Noelle Hones and Cllr Lesley Wagland for their support in the campaign.

I'm delighted to be able to say that following a campaign by myself and my colleagues an independent review is going to be undertaken by the Electricity System Operator to consider alternative offshore routes for electricity transmission in East Anglia. I am very pleased that, at last, people living on the route will see a comprehensive cost benefit analysis of offshore versus onshore options. Whilst this is no guarantee that plans for onshore pylons will be cancelled, it is an important step – I am urging ESO to involve my constituents in the process as much as possible. ■



More than a hundred people attended my meeting in Ingatestone about the pylon proposals. [Photo: Ian Davidson]