

Autumn Newsletter 2021

Dr Neil Hudson MP Penrith and The Border



Welcome

I hope that readers had a refreshing summer and are in good spirits as the days grow shorter moving into Autumn. Please find my Autumn Newsletter below; it has the latest updates from my work in Westminster and the Constituency.

Broadband and Phone Connectivity Update



My 'Better Connectivity' campaign has been up and running for over a year now and it has been a key pillar of my campaigning in Parliament since my election. The issue of sluggish broadband speeds and poor phone signal is an endemic one in Cumbria and familiar to many constituents, particularly over the course of the pandemic when virtual education and employment became a feature of everyday life. I consistently meet with Ministers, industry leaders, local and parish councils and local residents to seek the best way forward for all in Penrith and The Border. We cannot have a situation where the smaller and more rural communities are left behind.

In a recent House of Commons Debate on this very subject I pressed the Digital Minister, Julia Lopez MP, to work with Broadband for the Rural North (B4RN) and other providers to make sure that the Project Gigabit (the Government's £5bn broadband project) procurement process did not prevent locally-led projects from progressing. As a result of my and colleagues' representations and those of B4RN's Chief Executive, Michael Lee, a number of B4RN's active projects over the next two years will now have the green light and there should be no need for any pause in their delivery. I believe this will help enable residents and businesses across Cumbria to reap the benefits of being at the forefront of our Project Gigabit programme. It was great to be able to use my position in Westminster to achieve this positive outcome for B4RN and my constituents.

New Cancer Centre and New Diagnostic Centre



Thousands of patients in Cumbria are set to benefit from state-of-the-art cancer diagnosis and treatment at the Northern Centre for Cancer Care – housed in the Cumberland Infirmary in Carlisle – which was officially opened by the Health Secretary Sajid Javid in August. I am sure that the new facilities will be greatly appreciated by my constituents and it will be such a benefit to receive this important specialist care closer to home. A huge thank you to everyone involved in this project and I wish the staff and patients well as this new chapter of Cumbrian healthcare begins.

Alongside this new centre is Government funding for a new diagnostic centre at Penrith Hospital which will provide services closer to home for people in Cumbria to meet rising demand, as part of the Conservative Government’s plan to tackle the NHS backlog and catch health issues quickly. These two centres are a clear example of this Government’s plans to support the health facilities in our area.

Virtual Farming Roadshow



I was delighted to hold my first Virtual Farming Roadshow for Penrith and The Border recently. The event gave farmers, landowners, and other rural stakeholders in Penrith and The Border an update on the delivery of current schemes and a chance to hear details on the Future Farming and Countryside Programme (FFCP). Attendees were also given the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns directly with senior officials from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Rural Payments Agency. With over 70 farmers and rural stakeholders in attendance the event was a great success and I look forward to organising future events on related subjects.

West Cumbria Coal Mine



The proposed West Cumbria Coal mine has been a source of some controversy in Cumbria and indeed the wider world. I welcome that the Government called it in for review. The Public Inquiry concluded on Friday 1st October and the Secretary of State, Michael Gove, is due to make a final decision shortly. I had previously signalled my support for the project with my fellow Conservative Cumbrian MPs. However, on reflection I now believe that the project should not go ahead. We simply cannot ignore the worsening climate crisis; we have seen ever increasing adverse weather events leading to catastrophic floods and fires. We just need to look at the western North America, Greece and Italy in terms of fires recently, and the catastrophic flooding in mainland Europe this summer, and in the eastern USA.

The publication this summer of the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** report makes stark reading and we need to act collectively as a world to fight climate change. Accordingly, with these developments and the changes in circumstances in mind, on reflection I do not think we should be progressing with new coal exploration, even for coking coal. I ask that the Government now acts to cancel this project and have made representations to that effect to Government and the Public Inquiry. With our leadership of the COP26 we have a real opportunity to set an example to the world if we do this. I understand the economic implications if such a decision is made and I encourage the Government as a priority to invest in opportunities for local and national employment in the renewable energies sector.

I welcome that The Government has confirmed its commitment to end unabated coal-power generation from 2025 and is consulting on bringing this date forward to 2024.

This would ensure that the deadline for the phase-out of coal from Britain's energy system is 1 October 2024. I hope that coal-generated energy will soon be a distant memory as the UK builds a greener and more resilient future in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Universal Credit, Triple Lock on Pensions and Social Care Levy

Recently, I have voted against the government in three areas. I am not afraid to vote for what I see as the best interests of my constituents, even if that means voting against my own Party. Firstly, on its plans to raise National Insurance to help fund health and social care. I fully agree that we need to increase funding for the NHS and Social Care and need to take the tough decisions as to how to do this. But I firmly believe that if you make a manifesto promise such as not raising National Insurance then you need to keep that promise.

Secondly, on the Triple Lock on pensions I felt uncomfortable about pensioners not receiving the support they need at this time of economic uncertainty so accordingly took the tough decision to vote against the government. Pensioners were relying on the Triple Lock to remain over the course of this Parliament as was promised in our manifesto, and removing it is the wrong move. This is something I have been consistent on, that we should keep our manifesto commitments to the electorate. We need to deliver on the platform that we laid out at the last election and not take the support that we received from the public for granted.

Thirdly, I also voted against the government on its plans to remove the uplift in Universal Credit. Unfortunately, I think the government has found itself on the wrong side of this debate. The £20 a week uplift in Universal Credit has been a lifeline to many of my constituents throughout the pandemic and it would not be prudent to take money out of people's pockets as the economy is still recovering from such a shock.

Pet Theft Legislation



I am delighted to see the government has responded to my repeated calls for a clampdown on pet theft by introducing a new criminal offence.

I have been a long-term campaigner for tougher sentences for pet theft, raising the issue in parliament and highlighting the problem as a Member of the Commons Environment Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee.

Based on the Government's Pet Theft Taskforce's recommendations, a new criminal offence for pet abduction is set to be introduced. The new law will recognise the welfare of animals and that pets are valued as more than property and will allow judges to hand down harsher sentences for this cruel act.

Stealing a pet is a despicable act and is incredibly distressing for animals and their owners. This new pet theft offence is a step in the right direction and the government is also making it easier to track those who commit this awful crime. We have a duty of care to protect and look after animals with dignity and respect as fully sentient beings.

One of my key campaigns since entering Parliament has been to improve the lives of animals and this is a great start in the protection of them. That said, I would like to see this legislation expanded to cover not just pets but other animals like horses and farm livestock, which sadly we see being stolen all too frequently in our area. I am raising this very point currently in Parliament with ministers as we speak. We need to put an end to these dreadful and distressing animal theft crimes. As a vet I feel incredibly strongly about this and our need to protect these animals and their owners.

Your voice in Westminster

I am determined to make sure that the voice of Cumbrians is heard loud and clear in Westminster. I am able to question Ministers on a regular basis on a range of topics important to you.



Writing to PM for a coordinated plan on Afghan Education

I signed a cross-party letter to the Prime Minister urging him to work with the G20 to fund a plan to support education in Afghanistan.

After the return of the Taliban to power, there are huge question marks on the future of education especially for young children, women and girls.

New Trade and Agriculture Commission announced

After consistent pressure applied on the government by myself and colleagues, they have finally announced that the New Trade and Agriculture Commission has been formed.

This is welcome news to farmers across Penrith and The Border and the wider UK but it is important that the Commission's recommendations are taken seriously. We need to make sure that Parliament is able to meaningfully scrutinise international trade deals. I will keep pushing hard on this issue. It is so important that our farmers are not undercut by cheaper sub-standard imports.

Ullswater Community College at PMQs

Penrith's Ullswater Community College needs a rebuild and I am determined to do all in my power to try to ensure that the fantastic work of the Head teacher and all associated with the school comes to fruition. I have already written to the Secretary of State for Education pressing for the school's redevelopment and have now raised this directly with the Prime Minister at PMQs.

Ullswater Community College is a central part of our community in Penrith, helping to develop skills of young people in a range of areas and disciplines. I will follow this issue very closely and encourage the Government and Council to allocate funding directly towards the redevelopment of UCC.

Out and About in the Constituency

One of the most rewarding parts of being your Member of Parliament is going out and meeting business owners and constituents to discuss the issues that matter to them.



Visits to local Schools across the Constituency

I have continued my course of visiting schools throughout the constituency.

Over the last few months I have visited Appleby Primary School, Appleby Grammar School, Nelson Tomlinson School, Brampton Primary School, Lanercost Primary School and Lowther Endowed School. We have a fantastic range of Primary and Secondary schools in Penrith and The Border and it is great to speak with the hard-working pupils and teachers about their experiences. And wonderful to meet the amazing pupils and be quizzed by their enquiring minds!



Outward Bound Centre at Howtown

It was great to visit the Outward Bound centre at Howtown at the end of the Summer. It has excellent facilities for children of all abilities to use. I am passionate about outdoor education and the wellbeing of young people and the Outward Bound Trust is a place that can offer so much to so many.

This is an issue I have raised repeatedly in the House of Commons directly to the Education Secretary, who has agreed that the benefits of outdoor education are important to highlight and recognised their value.



A66 Project raised with Prime Minister

At a recent Prime Minister's Questions session I asked the Prime Minister to encourage his government departments to ensure local communities are not adversely affected by the planned A66 route.

The PM has committed his government to listening to local feedback before finalising the route. As I have said many times publicly, I welcome the A66 Project, and the opportunities it presents to our region, but it absolutely must consider the strength of feeling in communities across Penrith and The Border.

Neil

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Working hard for Penrith and The Border



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