

# Dr Neil Hudson's Year in Review Newsletter



## Introduction

It's been another year when coronavirus had dominated the headlines and that is no surprise as we were living under restrictions for much of the year. Whilst coronavirus and the vaccine rollout have been dominant themes, I was able to deliver in many other areas for the constituents of Penrith and The Border. Please enjoy my 'Year in Review' newsletter and I wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

## **Support for Farmers across Penrith and The Border**



As an MP for a rural constituency, standing up for farmers is a key priority for me. Our farmers are the best in the world in what they do and I will continue to champion the causes that are important to them. I have a good relationship with National Farmers' Union and its President Minette Batters as we see eye-to-eye on many issues. There are three main areas where I stand up for farmers, which I will outline below.

Firstly, I voted to keep the UK's high animal welfare and food production standards in future trade deals. It is crucial that our fantastic farmers are not undercut by cheaper foreign produce that does not meet our high standards. I am an active member of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee (EFRA), which published a report on Environmental Land Management (ELM) and the agricultural transition that should receive a response from the government by the end of the year. The ELM scheme is the centrepiece of the Government's new approach to farm support, as well as being key to delivering its environmental ambitions. Over the period 2021-27, the new scheme will be piloted and then fully introduced, while EU-style direct payments will be phased out. Ahead of the national pilot of ELM launching in 2021, this inquiry asked if the Government's plans were realistic and whether it had listened to farmers and land managers. Importantly we looked at the issues facing tenant farmers, upland farmers and common land. We looked at the support farmers would need to manage the transition, and how the new scheme could be made to work for farmers and the environment.

I was delighted to organise and 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). I am very keen to give farmers a chance to question Government officials about the issues affecting them, 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.

## Rural Mental Health



This year I used my position on the Commons EFRA Committee to trigger a wide-ranging inquiry into rural mental health. This is such an important issue for our rural communities who have to deal with isolation, stressful businesses and shocks like floods and animal disease outbreaks. As a vet myself, a profession in this sector with a higher than average incidence of mental health issues and suicide, I know how important it is that we shine a light on these issues. That way if we talk about them, we can improve the help and support that is available. I really encourage people to take part and submit evidence to our inquiry.

## **Flood protection**



It has been another tough year for adverse weather in Penrith and The Border, with recent floods being testament to that. I have been working with the government to secure investment for our flood defences and have questioned the Flooding Minister with regards to funding and support in Parliament. I am delighted that this has resulted in our area being allocated over £16 million to help combat flooding. These funds will allow us to protect over 1,900 more homes throughout Eden, preventing families from the terrible ordeal of a flooded home.

## **Newton Rigg**

Any review of the year would not be complete without reference to the sad closure of Newton Rigg in July. I worked hard with Ullswater Community College, in partnership with Myerscough College, to help secure a lifeline for land-based education in Cumbria. It is not by any means an exact substitute for the number of students who were enrolled or facilities available at Newton Rigg but it is certainly a positive start and a step in the right direction. I continue to engage with key stakeholders as we work to establish a new Newton Rigg, which is what rural Cumbria crucially needs.

## Visits to Vaccine Centres



Earlier in the year I visited vaccination centres at Penrith Hospital and the Large Vaccination Centre at the Auction Mart.

Our current progress and future success rely on the NHS staff and volunteers involved in the vaccine rollout. I would like to thank them all for their tireless efforts. Due to their hard work thousands of people in Penrith and The Border have received three Covid vaccine doses, which will offer life-saving protection to them and their loved ones this winter. It is truly our most effective shield against the virus and by taking the vaccine you are not only protecting yourself but others too. I once again encourage all those who have not yet come forward to take up the offer of a vaccine – booster jabs will protect the progress we have made against the virus and ensure that we can all enjoy Christmas safely with our loved ones in the safe knowledge that we have taken the responsible steps to protect them from the virus.

One year on our historic vaccination programme is not over and we can all still do our bit this winter and stay ahead in the race against the virus by taking up the offer of a vaccine as soon as we are eligible.

## Improved Broadband



Reliable broadband for people across Penrith and The Border has never been more important as more people are working from home and in lockdown children needed access to remote learning. I will not stop campaigning on this until every household in Eden has access to a good quality internet connection. Cumbrians are fed up with being 'the end of the line' when it comes to broadband connectivity. Working directly with rural broadband provider B4RN and the government, including the Minister for Digital Infrastructure, we have helped to ensure that over 2785 more homes in Eden will benefit from full fibre broadband.

## Supporting Local Schools



Our schools and colleges are integral parts of our community and are so important in developing the skills of young people – giving them the best possible start in life. I have visited numerous schools over the past year, including: 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.

With a background in the education sector myself, I am acutely aware that schools require funding packages to secure their future. That is why I am proud to have helped to secure £5.3 million from the government to improve educational facilities such as Ullswater Community College in Penrith and I have raised the issue of a necessary rebuild there directly with the Prime Minister. I was also delighted that Appleby Grammar was chosen as part of the government's £1 billion school rebuilding programme.

## New Cancer Centre in Carlisle and diagnostic centre in Penrith



We need to support health care in our area. I was therefore delighted that Penrith was selected as one of 40 sites for a new Community Diagnostic Centre. The centre will provide a providing a one-stop-shop for key testing to boost early diagnoses and speed up and increase referrals. It also means that local people can receive as much care as possible locally, without having to travel out of the area.

Furthermore, over the summer Health Secretary Sajid Javid opened a new cancer centre in Carlisle. The £35 million Northern Centre for Cancer Care, North Cumbria, integrates cancer diagnosis and treatment across Cumbria, with a chemotherapy day unit plus radiotherapy and diagnostic imaging. The new facilities will be greatly appreciated by readers and it will be such a benefit to receive this important specialist care closer to home.

## Animal Welfare



There has been good progress on animal welfare over the past year and a key success for campaigners including myself on tougher sentences. Animal abusers now face up to five years in prison as the Animal Welfare Sentencing Act passes into law. This law is a huge step forward for animal welfare in the UK and I am delighted that justice will now be served for animals. Tougher sentences will act as a stronger deterrent to potential animal abusers and will help to get one step closer to stamping out animal cruelty once and for all.

Furthermore, I sat on the Kept Animals Bill Committee and I pressed the case on a number of points in Committee stage including: animal theft, bolstering the UK abattoir network, increasing health checks & treatments in imported animals (eg rabies, ticks, Brucella canis), veterinary capacity, tackling pet smuggling and mutilations such as ear cropping in dogs.

I am pleased that the Government has made progress in a number of these areas but it could still go further and I will keep pushing them.