

Spring Newsletter 2022

Ukraine and Russia



There can be no doubting that Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine is the major issue in world politics at present. The post-Cold War settlement has been threatened before but this blatant and unforgivable attack on a sovereign nation in Europe will change the continent's, and the world's, geo-politics for decades to come.

The UK's sanctions regime, which has had an impact on total Russian assets of £364bn, is to be applauded. Where I feel the Government needs to do better is on the issuing of visas to those fleeing war. With the Home Office slow to act, and the number of visas issued being dwarfed by other European nations, I have made representations to the Home Secretary on this and spoken on it in the House of Commons chamber. I would urge the UK to work with our friends and allies in Europe to offer safe haven for these stricken folk. We are now seeing progress with the new schemes announced but I am urging Government to act more quickly and compassionately.

It was humbling to be in the House of Commons Chamber to listen to Ukraine's President Zelenskyy's address to Parliament earlier this month. It was a truly historic and momentous moment to be addressed in the heart of a stable and peaceful democracy by a brave wartime leader nearby in Europe fighting for his and his country's very existence. The House is united in its support of President Zelenskyy and all Ukrainians whose lives have been irreparably changed by the conflict. The message is clear, we are fully behind Ukraine and Putin must not be victorious.

Levelling up Rural Communities in Cumbria



I proposed and led a recent Commons debate on levelling up rural communities in Cumbria. The Government's flagship levelling up agenda has laudable aims, but we need to make sure that rural communities, like those across my constituency of Penrith and The Border, are not left behind. I delivered a speech that covered a number of the areas of concern to local residents. I discussed connectivity challenges, both physical and virtual, the need for continued Government support in the hospitality, tourism and farming sectors and the need for the Government to pivot away from London-centric ideas. I will keep pushing for better rural buses, improved broadband and mobile phone coverage. These are so important for our area.

Furthermore, there is a huge issue with second homes in Cumbria, which is pushing local people out of our area and inflating house prices. We need to address this head on and there are some positive initial steps from the Government on this, but I am pushing them to go further. Cumbria can no longer be treated as the 'end of the line' when it comes to sharing Government funds and projects.

Parish Councils virtual/hybrid sitting

During the height of the pandemic Parish Councils were sitting virtually. In our rural areas there are huge benefits to allowing Parish Councils to continue to meet virtually or in hybrid format. This capability changed in May 2021 when the High Court ruled that these should be in-person meetings. I have been campaigning for a reinstatement of these virtual/hybrid rules on behalf of Parish Councils across Penrith and The Border and took the opportunity in the Chamber of the Commons to question the Local Government Secretary, Michael Gove, on this. He was receptive to the idea, but we now need to see actions match words. I have been working with the Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) on this and we are both very keen for this necessary change in the legislation to happen.

Pausing of Smart Motorways



I was pleased to see the Government pause the rollout of smart motorways. They have taken on the recommendations of the Transport Select Committee's report. Accidents on smart motorways are too frequent and are horrific for all concerned and wherever possible, action should be taken to ensure the safety of road users. As a vet, I have attended awful road accidents involving horses and I firmly believe that we need fully functioning hard shoulders on our motorways. I hope the Government and Highways England will cease the use of existing smart motorways, alongside the pause on installing new ones.

Deploying armed forces in extreme weather events



In House of Commons Defence Questions, back in January, I praised the role of armed forces personnel throughout emergencies but urged the Government to put in place measures to speed up their deployment.

Our amazing armed forces have stepped up time and again to help us in major national crises and having worked with them during the Foot and Mouth Outbreak, I know first-hand that there is no one better in times of crisis like this. Throughout the pandemic our armed forces have been at the forefront of supporting our vital public services. Their hard work has bolstered the vaccine effort and managed to get more jabs into arms.

That said, I am clear that we cannot have another Storm Arwen situation where frankly the Government were too slow to deploy the armed forces. The help is there and ready but the system getting it to where it is most needed needs improvement.

In Westminster

Rural Crime and Support for the Police

People in rural communities, like Penrith and The Border, sadly have to contend with rural criminality including: vehicle crime, property damage, poaching, farm animal machinery theft and animal theft. I am very grateful for the work that Cumbria police do in trying to combat these offences alongside Cumbria Farm Watch. I recently spoke on this very issue in Parliament.

Not only is the loss of both animals and physical property a scourge on rural communities but also we must be aware of the mental health impacts for those who fall victim to these awful acts. I have triggered an inquiry into Rural Mental Health by the Commons EFRA Select Committee, on which I sit. We will be looking at just such issues.



Allow Parliamentary time to consider UK's actions to support Ukraine



I joined colleagues from across the House of Commons in expressing solidarity with the people of Ukraine. My thoughts and prayers go out to all those effected by the conflict particularly those trying to protect their families.

I questioned the leader of the House of Commons to allow parliamentary time for MPs to consider the UK's response, alongside international sanctions. I am pleased that this request has been taken on board.

Strength of the Commonwealth/Tonga

Elsewhere in the world we saw the devastating impact of the earthquake and consequent tsunami in Tonga. I took the opportunity to question the Foreign Office Minister, on the strength of our support and the importance of the Commonwealth in helping countries in times of need.

Out and about in the constituency

Bampton Community Pub



It was fantastic to meet up with and throw my support behind the Bampton Valley Community Pub team. It is so great to see the famous Cumbrian community spirit in action.

By the 1st March they had raised £360,000 in their community share scheme- and this then increased to hit the stretch target of £400,000, a magnificent achievement. They have only gone and saved their pub, and I am so thrilled for them!

Meeting with Penrith Futures Partnership



I also recently met in Penrith with folk from the Penrith Futures Partnership to hear about their thoughts and ideas for Penrith and our surrounding area. Penrith Futures Partnership comprises people from backgrounds including finance, building development, property management. We met to discuss the future of Penrith town centre and the town more generally. We had a wide-ranging and helpful discussion on areas like planning, connectivity, business, transport, housing & mental health.

Fix the Fells and Friends of Ullswater



It was great to be at Aira Force to meet with folk from Fix the Fells and Friends of Ullswater. These fantastic volunteers do so much to look after and restore the environment that is so precious to all of us.

Fix the Fells is a charity that cares for the Lake District's mountain paths and landscape. A place worth protecting. Protecting our natural environment is a priority of mine and I know from correspondence that it's hugely important to my constituents as well.

Education/Schools Update

A wonderful part of my job is school visits and speaking with inspiring students and staff from across the constituency.

Queen Elizabeth Grammar School in Penrith



The students at Queen Elizabeth Grammar School were so great to engage with. They asked really insightful, challenging and thoughtful questions on Ukraine, climate change, the environment, housing, education and honesty and integrity in politics.

Ullswater Community College students visit Parliament



It was fantastic to welcome students and staff from Ullswater Community College to Parliament recently. They had some brilliant questions about Westminster and politics more broadly; who knows there might even be a future MP in their midst!

William Howard School – Archaeological opportunity

An amazing opportunity for students from the William Howard School in Brampton to learn practical archaeological skills was offered in February.

Thanks to a partnership between Historic England and the Vindolanda Trust, ten students from three nearby high schools (including the William Howard School) were able to apply.

