

Beaches on the South Coast and Around the World

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The offshore Rampion wind farm produces electricity that can power half the homes in Sussex. It is an example of conception, planning, financing and carrying through to successful operation a major public benefit project over nine years by a responsible private company.

The short recent national grid failure had unacceptable and unexpected consequences. Hospitals and the train services are supposed to keep going. It does not matter whether the faults were at regional, local or national level; it does matter that lessons are identified and that the problems are fixed.

It was predictable that the usual voices called for nationalisation of the industries of power distribution and generation. Perhaps the owners of the voices were not around when ministers at the Treasury decided just about every issue facing coal, steel, railways, telephones, shipbuilding and the major road haulage company, the ports, the airlines and other industries.

When I worked in industrial relations at the head office of the renationalised British Steel Corporation, we had to wait two weeks to be allowed to change the pay of just 25 employees because our sponsoring ministry needed clearance from a junior official in Whitehall. An investment like Rampion would have been competing for resources with hospitals and schools.

In the past week Worthing has seen good contingency planning in action. When there was reason to check whether there was hazardous material causing illness for people on the beach, the local blue-light services came into action. The Coastguard, the Police and the NHS medical services took precautions and then cooperated with the Environment Agency to investigate whether there was an identifiable source or cause of concern.

Over 30 years I have seen the contribution of Graham Feest, Worthing resident and famous expert on road safety issues. He started with Worthing Borough Council in 1974, the year I first stood for parliament, before he transferred to West Sussex. Notably, he ran AIRSO for 25 years. The Association of Industrial Road Safety Officers brings together the blue light services with private sector organisations. I have spoken at their gatherings. Graham is one of the best examples of local expertise becoming recognised nationally.

The present national consultation on requiring operators of park home, often sited by our beaches, to be fit and proper people follows the dedication of the experts brought together by Nat Slade of Arun District Council. He and Councillor Terence Chapman gave me information and encouragement to push government into action after a notorious operator made a deliberate mess of the lives of residents he controlled improperly.

As MPs, we have the ability to fight for the vulnerable, the frail, the poor and the downtrodden. While working for them, I have been threatened with violence and worse, I have been threatened with defamation claims and I have had my reputation challenged by absurd allegations of impropriety. That is less risky than the real dangers faced by the Canadians memorialised at the coast by Grand Avenue.

Every few years I try to visit the place in Normandy where my father was twice shot in 1944. At the Armed Forces Day on the Steyne, I bought booklets on the D-Day landings, covering the advance reconnaissance to check the beach conditions by people including my father-in-law who had come up from Cornwall where he had navigated a small French fishing boat to and from Brittany, carrying agents and communications. He was the best inshore sailor to whom I have entrusted my life. My longest voyage was working my passage from Brisbane to Liverpool on a small cargo vessel. I learnt sea-shanties from Commodore Brook who first served before the mast sailing around the world.