

The Cost to Protect Democracy

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Images of lives in ruin, destruction and mayhem abound as our neighbours in Ukraine battle on to protect their democracy. On Tuesday in the debate in the House of Commons on Ukraine, I asked the Government to respond to the passionate pleas from the general public who want to help. At the time of writing more than 100,000 UK citizens have registered to house a UK refugee.

There have been many examples of charity within our communities over the past weeks. Tens of thousands of pounds have been raised by local communities here in Worthing and Arun including the local Rotary Club and by supporters of Worthing FC. Worthing Theatres and Museum, alongside local residents Iryna Latsanych and Phil Sheffield, have organised large-scale collections of needed items. It is heart-warming to again witness the generosity of the British people during a time of crisis. When asked to help, the communities of Worthing and Arun answer unequivocally.

During the debate, I called on the Government to harness the power of our local newspapers in reaching a broad cross section of our communities. We have witnessed how independent media has been stifled in Russia. We value the role of the Worthing Herald, Littlehampton Gazette and others in contributing to our vibrant and healthy democracy. The importance of protecting these freedoms, even when considering seemingly small local issues, must not be underestimated.

In the interests of protecting the majority view across my constituency rejecting the plans to develop Goring Gap, I have asked the Speaker if I can urgently address the government to ensure the planning inspector's decision to reject the council's decisions on the Goring Gap proposals can be immediately revoked. It is wrong that the Inspectorate would overrule the elected council's justified refusal to build over 400 homes in the Goring Gap. I first warned the Prime Minister of the threat in October 2019, when new planning rules were under review. This development must not happen.

The last time we came close to a popular revolution was at the failure of the Reform Bill in 1831. The Great Reform Act was passed the following year. It is remembered for abolishing the infamous 'rotten borough' constituencies. Modern legislation requires revision of constituencies on a regular timetable without allowing either House of Parliament the opportunity to interfere.

For 25 years, I have been privileged to serve the Arun wards of Rustington, Ferring and East Preston with Kingston together with most of Worthing. That had the advantage of full responsibility to do everything possible to preserve the green fields that give definition to the friendly neighbourhoods and villages that distinguish our community in West Sussex. It has been helpful that the Littlehampton Gazette and the Worthing Herald cover these area together.

On Monday I joined other MPs with the Boundary Commission to ask for a sensible amendment to the proposal to recreate the Worthing parliamentary constituency.

It is regrettable that the initial Boundary Commission for England's (BCE) proposals did not explain why they thought residents in Salvington and in Offington had more in common with Littlehampton and Arundel, rather than with Worthing and Sompting. My presentation started with the proper observation that MPs in a fair democracy are chosen by constituencies, not the other way around. An experienced MP can contribute local knowledge, offering proposals based on community identity. BCE oddly want to omit Salvington and Offington while separating two Arun wards from their natural neighbours. I echoed multiple representations by Salvington residents asking to remain with Worthing.

The Worthing constituency should only include Worthing wards. There is no need and no benefit to bring in reluctant residents in Adur. Similarly, there is the obligation and the benefit of keeping as many Worthing residents as possible in the Worthing constituency. The way to do this within the rules on numbers while reducing disturbance is to keep Salvington within Worthing, letting Offington remain unchanged in the Shoreham seat.

Residents have two weeks to offer their own thoughts and to express their interests. They can do so here: <https://bcereviews.org.uk>. Those wishing to offer their assistance to Ukrainian refugees can find more information here: <https://homesforukraine.campaign.gov.uk/>.