

Meetings to Improve Lives

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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Some meetings are informal: on a late London bus from Westminster, I talked briefly to a minister of housing. I need to see officials and ministers about planning issues and about fire safety in blocks of flats.

The latest concern is the threatened development of green land around Kingston, the hamlet protected by farms between Ferring and East Preston. I will work with residents and the parish councils to assist Arun District Council resist an irreversible change to the historic setting of quiet communities.

Lucky people were in the Mall for the Jubilee parade. Millions including my family enjoyed the Sunday entertainments on television. We thank the contributors, the organisers and the police for superb arrangements.

On Tuesday in the Commons Speaker's Court the Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines Beat Retreat to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the Falkland Islands. I stood with parliamentary staff, applauding the band and the Falklands veterans.

I am sorry so many were caught when the RMT union caused chaos. Many lower paid workers and commuters from the constituency struggled to find other ways to get to work when the underground railway service stopped in most of London. One dentist said her 50 minute journey took three hours; it also made travel difficult for patients coming for treatment.

Let us be surprised by a year without disruption by the RMT. Union leaders have the option to help the public, not hinder the vulnerable. The threat of three no-rail days in a week later in June will hinder students sitting examinations across coastal West Sussex. The real threat to future rail jobs comes from reduced use. Who will buy a season ticket for an unreliable service?

We now know the pointless bin strike will have harmful financial consequences for services provided by Worthing Borough Council. I support the aims of trade unions and professional associations – and I shall use my position to argue that we are all better served when strikes are the last resort.

In recent days, I joined Councillor Ricky Bower with residents in Kingston Gorse to review the importance of maintaining sea defences. The science of groynes and the physics of coastal drift are important.

Wednesday has been World Oceans Day. I take this as encouraging Worthing's proposal for a kelp forest in Sussex bay and in making sure further offshore wind farms are consistent with government guidelines, protecting the views from the South Downs National Park.

I attend regular meetings with the minister responsible for overcoming barriers to the welcoming of Ukrainian refugees. The latest information is that 65,000 have arrived. A number shared the neighbourhood Platinum Jubilee party. Many schools and community groups are helping children and their mothers become part of our shared lives.

No one should be alone. Households including a person with undiagnosed dementia need especial consideration. Living well is increasingly possible when a problem is identified and help is available. At the conclusion of National Volunteers Week, I applauded all who assist medical and social service charities, alongside the Platinum Jubilee helpers.

At times, I compare my working life with a newspaper editor. We need to be aware of everything that is going on; we must be alert to the times when breaking news demands a quick comprehensive response; and we have to seek answers to tough questions.

For nearly ten years, I have faced the professional challenge by Oli Poole, moving on from editing this newspaper. He never feared being awkward when he judged it necessary. I write for many in thanking him and his colleagues for all they do.