

# **A Duty to Protect**

*Sir Peter Bottomley MP*

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It is possible to look each day at progress or to worry about what has not yet been achieved.

When I first stood for election as an MP, Greece, Spain and Portugal were dictatorships. Elected a year later, one of my first campaigns was for a group of women representing a young Jewish man denied permission to leave Soviet Russia.

In 1988 at a technical road conference in West Berlin, it was not sensible to predict that within eighteen months the Wall would come down. Within five years the Budapest Memorandum was agreed, withdrawing nuclear weapons from Ukraine with the USA, the UK and Russia agreeing to be guarantors.

We had had responsibility for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in the 1950s, the year before I was taught at school in Washington DC that the right action was to shelter under my desk if atomic attack sirens sounded.

The first duty of government is to try to protect the people from unnecessary international war or from civil war. Then we can turn to health protection and health care for all, pension protection, better housing, action on climate change, protecting the environment, and many other important topics.

This week, professionally and personally, I am trying to help overcome the problems affecting the Ukrainian refugees. Family Sponsorship Visa processing speeds need improvement. WSCC are co-ordinating the checks with the families generously sponsoring refugees. Our teams stand ready to help with any issues arising. On Friday 25, Head Teacher Pete Byrne invited me to join the vigil for peace when students at Oscar Romero Catholic High School assembled on Goring Greensward. I thank Father Terry Martin for leading the prayers.

In recent days I met the positive team at the Job Centre in Worthing. They help match employers with job seekers. The self-employed can receive advice and help. The young can be guided to training and first jobs. The atmosphere is welcoming. The activity is effective.

By Easter, the Perch on the Pier will add to Worthing's rich hospitality scene. We thank Alex Hole. It has been encouraging to see the major investment that preserves and improves the town for residents and visitors.

At the Ferring Rife by Goring Street, local pupils from Oscar Romero Catholic School spoke to the assembled crowd in opposition to plans to build over the strategic Goring Gap, giving separate identity to our villages and towns. I invited Bob Smytherman and Dr Rebecca Cooper to speak, before asking Worthing Council leader Kevin Jenkins to tell us of the application for judicial review. It cannot be reasonable for one government inspector to overturn what a previous government inspector, council planners and local residents have all agreed which is that the Goring Gap is protected against the bulldozers.

On Wednesday I was at Ferring Village Hall to respond negatively to the proposal to turn the local vineyard into a housing site. Every green field between Worthing and Rustington is a profitable target to developers.

The day before, I joined the march to Downing Street of people bereaved by Covid. The Thames embankment wall by St Thomas' Hospital has red hearts with names of many of the 186,000 plus deaths. Worthing resident Donna Broderick told me about her father. Campaigners want the wall preserved as a permanent memorial.

My association with justice for leaseholders continues. Their homes should be safe and saleable. Their interests should be protected. The Building Safety Bill is being improved in the House of Lords, sometimes further than government presently intends.

On Tuesday, with the campaigning charity Leasehold Knowledge Partnership, I asked the Financial Conduct Authority to require full disclosure of commissions and pay-backs by every organisation involved in property insurance paid for by the leaseholders who do not own the building. I also asked that leaseholders be recognised as having a legal interest in the policy they pay for.

This campaign has continued for over fifteen years – the Government has a duty to do protect innocent leaseholders. Progress is coming: why has it taken so long?

The force of argument overcomes the argument of force.