Newsletters from James MacCleary MP for Lewes Constituency

June Newsletters

Week 3

I hope you're having a good start to the summer!

I'll start with the "important" news: England won against Croatia. As someone who has spent enough years supporting England to know not to get carried away, I'll simply say it was a welcome start to the tournament.

Away from the football, it's been another busy few weeks in Westminster and across Lewes constituency. Here's a quick update on some of the issues I've been working on, from supporting the campaign to save The Fountain Inn in Plumpton to pressing the Government for answers on defence and national security.

Campaign to Save The Fountain Inn

Across the country, pubs are facing growing financial pressures. Rising employment costs, National Insurance contributions, business rates and inflation have created a perfect storm for many local businesses.

Most recently The Fountain Inn in Plumpton has come under threat of closure, which would be a devastating loss to the community.

The good news is that local residents are refusing to give up. A community-led campaign has been launched to purchase The Fountain Inn and secure its future as a community-owned pub. The campaign has even been supported by the Queen and is currently raising funds to buy the building and ensure it remains at the centre of village life for years to come. (Save The Fountain)

Though I wish I didn't have to, I'm all too happy to support this campaign and in Parliament I spoke about what can be done and why our pubs are so important, which you can watch here.

Put simply pubs provide far more than food and drink. They create jobs, support local suppliers and help tackle loneliness and polarisation by bringing communities together. In our increasingly fragmented online world community assets like the pub have never been more important.

Celebrating Sussex Day in Parliament

This month I was delighted to celebrate Sussex Day in Parliament alongside fellow Sussex MPs and the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Sussex Day is an opportunity to reflect on everything that makes our county such a special place to live. From our beautiful coastline and historic towns to our villages, farms and thriving local businesses, Sussex has a proud identity and a rich heritage.

As the Member of Parliament for Lewes, Seaford, Newhaven, Polegate and our surrounding communities, I am constantly reminded of the dedication and community spirit shown by local people. Whether it is volunteers supporting local causes, small businesses creating jobs, farmers producing food or fishermen working along our coast, the people of Sussex make our county what it is.

It is a privilege to represent our corner of Sussex in Parliament and to champion the communities that make it such a wonderful place to call home.



Defence Secretary’s Resignation Raises Serious Questions

The resignation of the Defence Secretary has exposed deep concerns at the heart of the Government's approach to national security.

At a time of growing international instability, Britain should have a clear plan to strengthen our Armed Forces and meet the challenges we face. Instead, the Government is mired in uncertainty, with no Defence Investment Plan published and no clear explanation of how ministers intend to fund the capabilities our military needs.

Following the Makerfield by-election there is now also a risk that Labour Party infighting over the coming months could delay the investment plan even longer. In 2024, this country voted for change, not more Conservative party style psychodrama.

As Liberal Democrat Defence Spokesperson, I have repeatedly pressed ministers for certainty. The Defence Secretary's departure raises serious questions about whether the Treasury is willing to provide the resources required to keep Britain safe, and whether the Government has a coherent long-term strategy at all.

Our Armed Forces cannot be expected to do more with less. Years of cuts under the Conservatives hollowed out Britain's military, yet the Government has still failed to set out how it will reverse that decline. The small uplift in defence spending through a reduction in our international aid spending is not the bold thinking we need.

Britain's security cannot be treated as an afterthought. The Government must come clean about its plans for defence spending, publish its long-promised Defence Investment Plan, and provide the certainty our industry, public and Armed Forces deserve.

Week 4

I hope you've managed to stay cool and also enjoy the recent heatwave last week!

Although the worst of the hot weather now seems to be behind us, it's worth remembering that heat exhaustion can sometimes take a little while to develop. If you've been feeling unwell after spending time in the heat, please don't ignore it and seek medical advice if you think you or your family may have been affected.

Despite the heat it's been a busy time, please see below: Newhaven West Beach, reflections ten years since the Brexit referendum, and my work in parliament on Russia's shadow fleet.

Newhaven West Beach

Newhaven West Beach has been back in the news recently as people are rightly frustrated that they can't freely enjoy the only sandy beach in the area, particularly in the sunny weather.

While I cannot condone people breaking into the beach, I completely understand why people would do so. During one of the hottest periods of the year, local families see one of our area's best beaches sitting empty behind locked gates.

I've been campaigning to reopen West Beach for years. As Leader of Lewes District Council, we entered serious negotiations to buy the beach, and came close to securing a deal before talks sadly collapsed. Since becoming your MP, I've met repeatedly with Newhaven Port and Properties, putting forward practical ideas including limited access days and trial summer openings. Every proposal has been rejected.

I recently introduced a Bill in Parliament calling for public access to be restored. While Presentation Bills rarely become law, they are another way of keeping pressure on those responsible and ensuring this issue stays firmly on the agenda.

This has never been about where the owners happen to be based. It's about giving local people back access to a beach that generations grew up enjoying.

The current situation satisfies nobody. Residents remain frustrated, the port continues to deal with trespass, and a fantastic community asset remains locked away.

I won't stop pressing for a safe, lawful and practical solution because Newhaven deserves better than the current stalemate.

If you want to help please sign my petition, having a large number of signatures can often be incredibly helpful so please take the time to lend your name to our cause:

https://www.leweslibdems.org.uk/westbeach

Ten Years On From the Brexit Referendum

Ten years on from the Brexit referendum, the world looks very different.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the return of Donald Trump to the White House have reinforced just how important our alliances are in an increasingly uncertain world.

I believe Britain is strongest when we work closely with our European neighbours, whether that's strengthening our collective security or growing our economy.

That's why I believe it's time to rebuild our relationship with Europe. The Liberal Democrats are calling for a new UK-EU Growth and Defence Partnership, including joining the Single Market and Customs Union, to help grow our economy, reduce costs for businesses and families, and strengthen our shared security.

The challenges we face don't stop at national borders, and neither should our response. Britain is safer when Europe is stronger, and Europe is stronger when Britain plays a leading role alongside our closest allies.

Russia's Shadow Fleet

I recently challenged the Defence Secretary on what more the Government is doing to tackle Russia's so-called shadow fleet.

The seizure of a Russian-linked vessel in the English Channel was absolutely the right decision, but it came weeks later than it should have.

These ageing tankers help Russia evade international sanctions and continue funding Vladimir Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Every shipment that gets through provides another financial lifeline for the Kremlin's war machine.

I asked the Defence Secretary whether the Government would commit to seizing more shadow fleet vessels and take stronger action against sanctions evasion.

I also asked if the seized cargo could be used to fund Ukraine's defence. I'm glad to see that the government now seems to be exploring this option.

Britain should be leading the way in cutting off the revenues that fund Putin's aggression. Working alongside our allies, we must do everything possible to stop Russia using our waters to bankroll its illegal war and ensure sanctions are properly enforced.

Best wishes,

James MacCleary
MP for Lewes, Seaford, Newhaven, Polegate and our East Sussex Villages
Liberal Democrats