
Like all of you, I've really enjoyed life starting to get back to normal over the past month.

After restrictions were eased in April, one of my first visits was to Priory Farm Estate, which is always such a wonderful experience. And for the first time in a long time, we were able to share their amazing maple ribs with friends in our garden.

I also spent time with local residents in Caterham Barracks and had the pleasure of meeting our local Towncrier, Sonia Hunt, who I can't wait to see in action soon.

Just before the weather took a turn for the worst at the end of April, I also met with Peter and George of family-run business J & J Franks at Mercers Quarry, which some of you may know is actually the largest deposit of soft sand in the South East. I thanked them for ensuring that their HGVs use the main roads and for protecting the local environment and wildlife, including planting 30,000 trees on their land.

They're a brilliant example of a thriving local business supporting the local community and how HGV movements can work if they're using the right roads and are not excessive. J & J Franks have been part of the community for over 80 years, and I look forward to working with them in the future.

In the run-up to the local elections, I also popped in to see Deano Cline, who does brilliant work at Whyteleafe Hub, and I couldn't resist picking up a few delicious cakes at Kindred Bakery too.

On election day, I stopped by the Dog and Duck in Outwood for a spot of lunch and enjoyed the wonders that Wayne and Donna have done with the garden. It was wonderful to hear locals have been flocking back.

Just as a reminder for businesses, the Government's Restart Grant scheme for the hospitality, leisure, accommodation, personal care and non-essential sector is now live and worth up to £18,000 for bigger hospitality, accommodation and leisure sites, and up to £6,000 for non-essential retailers.

Earlier this month, I was delighted that the Prime Minister confirmed not only that we met the four tests needed to move to Step 3 of the roadmap out of lockdown on 17 May, but that we are also on course to move to Step 4 next month, which would see the removal of most restrictions

At the time of writing, Britain has administered over 53 million vaccinations, with more than 796,800 people across Surrey Heartlands having already received a vaccine.

I actually had the chance to visit one of our local vaccination centres in Smallfield recently. The entire operation is so impressive, and I know everyone across East Surrey will join me in thanking everyone involved for their herculean efforts over the past few months.

Another priority of mine in the months ahead will be making sure our young people don't fall behind after the challenges of the past year.

I was very pleased to have collaborated with local leaders to secure a Youth Hub for East Surrey, which launched on 1 March and has already supported more than 20 young people into work and training opportunities.

Looking ahead, the Hub will have a physical presence in the Harlequin Theatre, the Workary and East Surrey College, with the physical launch in mid-June. You can get in touch with the team and find out more by emailing youth.hub@reigate-banstead.gov.uk.

The new Gatwick Response Hub is also open to provide advice and skills support to all those affected by the aviation industry's job losses. The Hub will have a physical presence in Gatwick Airport, but you can also get in touch with the team and find out more by emailing gatwick.resourcehub@dwp.gov.uk.

As part of a digital workshop by Parliament's education centre, I also had the chance to take part in a Q&A session with pupils from Tatsfield Primary School recently.

They asked about a range of issues, from what law I would pass if I could wave a magic wand, whether MPs automatically become members of the House of Lords and, crucially, when they can go on holiday again! Tatsfield certainly has a strong crop of future MPs in the making.

On the subject of schools, I would just like to thank everyone working in education across the whole of East Surrey – from staff to parents to volunteers – for all their hard work to ensure a successful return to the classroom last month.

From my experience working on education policy, I know all too well that there is no substitute for in-person teaching and the social interaction it brings, so it was wonderful to see our children back with their teachers and friends.

Like all of you, I'm very much looking forward to what will hopefully be a great British summer – with a great British heatwave too if we're lucky. I hope you will all get a chance to spend some quality time with family and friends in the weeks ahead, able to catch up on lost time.

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