



November 2020 update report

Dear Friends and Residents

Hello again and I hope you and your loved ones are safe and well.

If you have questions, concerns or need help during this very worrying period, then please email me anytime at helen.grant.mp@parliament.uk

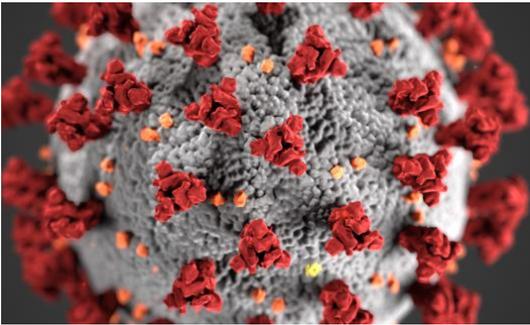
or call my office on 0207 219 7107.

Meanwhile, I am pleased to set out below some updated information and a summary of some of our activities since my last bulletin, including:

- Covid-19 Update
- Planning and Housing
- No to 2000 Marden campaign
- Brexit Update
- Commuter Trains Update
- New export opportunities

- New Constituency office

Covid – 19 Update



The Government are, once again, requiring us to ‘Stay at Home’ and to only go out for specific reasons which include: for education, to go to work where you cannot work from home, to exercise, for any medical appointments and to shop for basic necessities.

For further details on the rules which will come into place on Thursday 5th November, please visit: <https://bit.ly/382pd7z>

The return to such stringent lockdown measures is disappointing and worrying and I do not underestimate how

difficult the coming weeks will be for families in Maidstone and The Weald. I do believe however that these restrictions are necessary to control the spread of the virus and to protect capacity in our NHS.



Community Support

Should you require assistance with issues such as accessing food or medicines, contact Kent County Council's 'Kent Together' Helpline on [03000 41 92 92](tel:03000419292) or by going to [this link](#)

Maidstone Borough Council also have helpful information for people who need support – [click here](#)



For many of the businesses across our community I know this will be a very difficult time, having just got back on their feet following the restrictions earlier in the year.

I am pleased that the Chancellor has extended the 'furlough' scheme for those unable to work due to the restrictions. Full details on the financial support available for employees and employers can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/worker-support>.



I am running a series of virtual roundtable meetings between now and the end of the year with a range of sectors including; businesses, charities, health

services and education providers. The aim is to discuss ideas as to how to manage our way through the pandemic and feed this information back to government to help them formulate policy and processes.

I will be contacting local leaders in each sector to arrange these meetings and if you would like to participate with constructive contributions I would welcome your approaches. Please email me with your request to helen.grant.mp@parliament.uk.

Planning and Housing



Government proposals for changes to the current planning system concern me profoundly. For Maidstone Borough Council the planned changes equate to

78% more homes than are scheduled in the existing Local Plan approved in 2017.

That's an increase from 883 houses per annum to 1,568 every year until 2037. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council also face eye watering hikes in their delivery targets.



In September, I gained the support of ten Kent MPs to write to the Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick, expressing our serious concerns and I then led a delegation of Kent MPs in a virtual meeting (pictured) with the Housing Minister Christopher Pincher.

He confirmed that the Government will be bringing forward revised plans soon, so let's hope some sense will prevail. Stay up to date on this and other campaigns on my

website:

<https://www.helengrant.org/myplan>.

Marden's 'No to 2000' campaign



On a related note, I am delighted that our [campaign to oppose the 2000 homes planned for Marden](#) won a victory last week. The proposals were not included in Maidstone Borough Council's latest list of sites earmarked for development in the Local Plan Review. For now, this threat to the unique rural nature of Marden village will not receive permission to proceed.

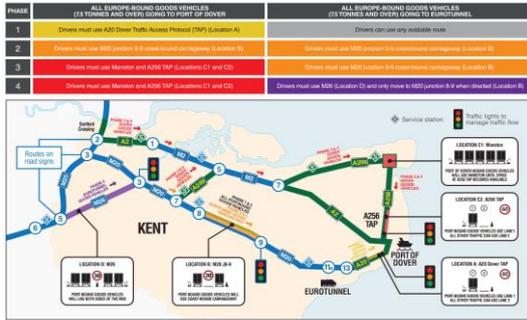
This success is testament to the power of local communities unified in a common cause, and I pay tribute to Claudine Russell and her magnificent team for

their resolve and determination
in this campaign.

Brexit in Kent



Our exit from the European Union will be complete on 31st December when the current transition period ends. For Kent, we need to ensure it is not the beginning of disruption caused at the Port of Dover by increased customs checks. For many months now, my team has therefore been meeting regularly, alongside my Kent MP colleagues and staff, with Cabinet Office Minister Michael Gove to ensure this is addressed.



Our main ask has been about avoiding a repetition of the ‘Summer of Stack’ in 2015 and the plan now in place is called Operation Brock.

In the event of a build-up of lorries queuing for the port, a contra-flow system will be implemented between junctions 8 and 9 of the M20, allowing traffic to move in both directions along the current London bound carriageway, whilst queuing lorries are parked on the coast bound carriageway.



On future trade with the EU, I support a Canada style free trade agreement and I hope the intensified talks which are currently taking place produce such an outcome.

[Click here to learn more about the](#)

Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement

https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ceta/index_en.htm

Commuter Trains Update



The campaign for the reintroduction of our much needed City Thameslink Service from Maidstone East continues unabated and I am very pleased that Kent County Council have underlined this in their [Kent Rail Strategy 2021](#) which is currently out for public consultation.



My planned roundtable meeting on this matter, with the Trains Minister Chris Heaton-Harris (pictured), was postponed earlier this year and will now take place virtually. It will be an important opportunity for our local

authorities, businesses and commuters to come together to demonstrate to the Minister the importance of this service to the County Town and to agree a plan of action for its implementation.

Trade Envoy Appointment



Last month I became the Prime Minister's UK Trade Envoy to Nigeria, the largest and fastest growing market in the African Continent, with a population of over 200 million people. The role builds on the UK's existing strong relationship with Nigeria, seeking to maximise bilateral trade between the two countries.

(Picture: with Liz Truss, Secretary of State for International Trade, on the day of my official appointment).



Among the many opportunities for British businesses is a huge new export market for agri-tech products and services. Kent's outstanding farming and horticultural industries have enormous expertise and skills to offer Nigeria and I will be developing this initiative with local companies in the coming months.

Do get in touch if you'd like to know more and have a look here as a taster

<https://www.great.gov.uk/markets/nigeria/>

New Constituency Office



After 6 happy and productive years at my Constituency office on the forecourt of Maidstone East station I am on the move. Network Rail, who own the site, are remodelling the

station and car park, which will mean the demolition of my premises – so no negotiation there I'm afraid.



For all the volunteers who have come along in the past to help with constituency work (as pictured) do not fret, our new home is under preparation. I have recently secured the 1st floor premises at 109 – 111 Week Street, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1RB, only about 150 yards from the old office.

Repair and maintenance work is going on now, to prepare the space for our purposes, and my team are all looking forward to resuming our Constituency work together there, once Covid restrictions allow. May that day come sooner rather than later.

Helen

Helen Grant MP

Member of Parliament for Maidstone and the Weald



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