

MP Parish Report – October 2026

Party Conference Recess

Parliament returned, albeit briefly, before the party conference recess and, luckily for me, that meant only a short journey down the road to Brighton for the Autumn Conference 2026. The conference covered a wide range of issues, from healthcare and economic growth to environmental protection, food security, defence and democratic reform, with members debating how we can build more resilient communities and a stronger economy in the years ahead.

One discussion that I found particularly relevant to our largely rural constituency focused on food security and resilience. Conference backed proposals aimed at strengthening domestic food production, improving supply chain resilience and ensuring that food security is given greater consideration in national policy making. At a time of geopolitical uncertainty, changing weather patterns and rising costs for producers, there was broad recognition that supporting British farmers and rural businesses is essential to both our economy and our national resilience. I also spoke on the importance of rural schools using Firle Primary as a particular example of both their importance and the difficulty of sustaining them.

The conference also adopted policies aimed at improving maternity and primary healthcare, supporting business growth and innovation, reforming the water sector and strengthening democratic institutions. It was also interesting to reflect on the Prime Minister's conference speech a week later. It was a thoughtful and, in parts, genuinely moving address that touched on many themes that Liberal Democrats have championed for many years: the importance of strong public services, thriving local communities, international cooperation and investing for the long term. While political differences remain, it is encouraging to see ideas that place opportunity, fairness and community at the heart of public policy receiving broader support across the political spectrum.

Lewes District Council Local Plan

I cautiously welcome Lewes District Council's decision to pause work on the Local Plan while it reviews the implications of changes to national planning policy and the uncertainty surrounding local government reorganisation. It is important that any Local Plan is based on the most up-to-date evidence and is robust enough to withstand scrutiny at examination.

However, I do have concerns about what a prolonged pause could mean for our area. Without an adopted and up-to-date Local Plan, there is a risk that Lewes District becomes more

vulnerable to speculative development, with developers seeking to bring forward sites that may not align with the wishes of local communities or the long-term vision for sustainable growth, as we have seen in the Wealden District part of my constituency.

I will continue pressing for clarity from government on LGR and for progress to resume as soon as practicable, so that local residents retain confidence that future development is being planned in a way that protects the character of our communities while delivering the homes and infrastructure we need.

Lewes Bus Station

This month I joined Lewes District Councillors Edwina Livesey, Janet Baah and Kevin West in writing to Councillor Bella Sankey, Chair of the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority, urging the Authority to explore the purchase of the Lewes bus station and former bus garage site.

Following years of uncertainty and a determined local campaign to safeguard the site for public use, there is now a genuine opportunity to secure its future. With the site currently on the market, I believe it is important that all options for public ownership are properly considered before this strategic asset is lost to other uses.

While the site sits in the heart of Lewes, its importance extends far beyond the town itself. The bus station serves as a key transport interchange linking Brighton & Hove with communities across East Sussex and neighbouring Kent, providing vital connections for work, education, healthcare and leisure. This is particularly important for many of our rural villages, where access to reliable public transport can be the difference between opportunity and isolation.

Public ownership could help protect this important transport hub for future generations, while also creating an opportunity to deliver much-needed affordable and social housing on the former bus garage site. With the Strategic Authority taking on responsibility for strategic transport as Sussex moves towards devolution and a directly elected mayor, I believe there is a strong case for acting now to secure infrastructure that will remain important to our communities for decades to come.

Primary care services

I was pleased to be able to join the Leader of Lewes District Council and others to open the new health hub in Newhaven recently. Many residents have concerns about accessing GP services locally and the new facility in Newhaven is now home to both Quayside Medical Practice and Newhaven Medical Practice (formerly known as Chapel Street).

Work has also started on a new health hub in Willingdon and I have been very pleased to work with both Wealden District Council and NHS Sussex to move this project forward after much delay. It is still in its very early stages but when complete it will be a valuable new facility serving Willingdon and Polegate.

I have also been meeting regularly with NHS Sussex to discuss the situations in Seaford and Lewes. I have been able to get the NHS to focus on redeveloping the existing Dane Road site in Seaford after years of broken promises over a new health hub for the town. I am now working with partners to put together the funding to move the project forward. In Lewes things are being delayed by hold ups to the North Street Quarter development which was to include a new health hub. I am exploring alternative options in the meantime with the local authorities and the NHS to address the accommodation issues facing Foundry Healthcare in the town.

Local rail services

I have met with Network Rail to raise ongoing rail disruption since the derailment at Lewes. They accept that the service has got worse since the accident and attribute this to heightened awareness from passengers and drivers of uneven track conditions in the local network. I highlighted the stretch of line between Lewes and Polegate as one of particular concern with a number of speed restrictions being imposed recently.

I have also met with Southern Rail to press them on the reinstatement of the direct Seaford to London services and the timings of the new Eastbourne to London Bridge services which return at an inconvenient time for commuters and only run during term time. I will be meeting with them again for an update soon.

Village meetings

I have now completed my 2026 tour of our local villages. Every year I try to get to every village in my constituency and this year we completed about 22 meetings in total. There were many issues raised but consistent themes included housebuilding, speeding and road safety, water supply and sewage disposal, public transport services and access to GPs and dentists. I have taken away actions for my team and extend my thanks to those Parish Councils who supported these meetings.

Remembrance and Christmas Services

As with previous years, I do try to attend Remembrance and Christmas events held around the constituency. If your parish or town is planning an event and would like me to attend, please contact helen.spearman@parliament.uk with details and I will endeavour to attend or provide a representative in my place.