

CAROLINE DINENAGE MP

*MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR GOSPORT
LEE ON THE SOLENT • STUBBINGTON • HILL HEAD*



March newsletter lands in your inbox ahead of what I hope will be a sunny Easter Bank Holiday weekend. I hope for many of you this will provide an opportunity to catch up with friends and loved ones and enjoy a little bit of chocolate!

For those readers on duty in our emergency services, or in military forces and far away from home, I would like to say a big thank you for keeping us safe throughout the Easter period.

Earlier this month we marked both Mother's Day and International Women's Day, so I also wanted to take this opportunity to send my love to all the wonderful female role models and community champions locally who do so much for our area.

At King's Academy Brune Park I was delighted to join female leaders and entrepreneurs on International Women's Day to speak to around 300 young women and girls about our careers, experiences and valuable lessons that we learned along the way. I was so impressed by the interest and attentiveness demonstrated by this brilliant young audience.

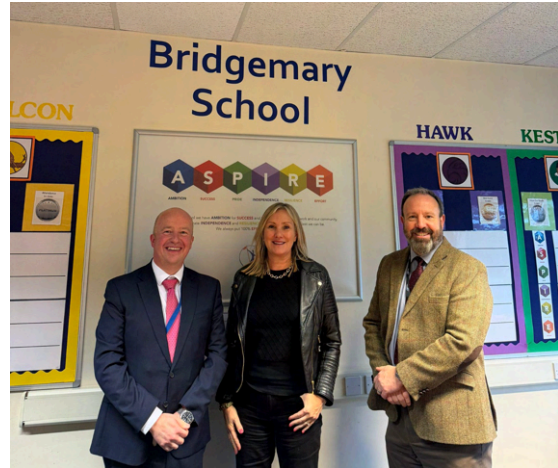
Maria and Lou Lou, the brains behind the Lightship, the Creek and the Coffee Quarters at Haslar are other inspiring local women. Both were recognised as MP HERoes alongside other businesswomen from across the UK. I was extremely happy and proud to catch-up with them in Parliament.





It was also a pleasure to teach a Democracy lesson to Year 6 children at Elson Junior School who became Honourable Ladies and Gentlemen for the day as we held a debate on pros and cons of a ban on social media for under 16s. The Government's consultation on this very issue is ongoing, and I encourage all parents to have a say [here](#).

I caught-up with Tom, the Headteacher at Bridgemary School, and Russell Hobby, the new Chief Executive of TKAT (their Academy Trust). I am extremely impressed by all the improvements at Bridgemary under Tom's leadership, and with hard work from staff and pupils, I'm excited for what the future holds. We discussed the importance of partnerships with local employers to ensure that students are well-equipped for the job market when they leave school and I have started to put in place some links to businesses in the area.



I touched on the same topic with Katy Taylor, the CEO of Wightlink, during my visit to their offices on the other side of the Harbour. The team employ a large number of ex-servicemen from our area, and I am also keen for them to collaborate with local schools and colleges to attract apprentices.

These conversations are extremely important especially in light of recent changes introduced by the Government. Employers tell me that increases to National Insurance Contributions have diminished prospects of employing new staff and hosting apprenticeships. Pubs and restaurants are also unsure how to cope with a hike in business rates. I [raised my concerns in the House of Commons Chamber](#) because I believe this has a direct knock-on effect on our young people and their career opportunities.

The Government has also announced reforms to the SEND system and launched a consultation which you can partake in via the link below. I receive a lot of correspondence outlining concerns about SEND provision from parents and carers on daily basis. To bring a bit more clarity in relation to the latest developments in this specific area, I created a hub on my website which provides you with all the relevant information [here](#). You can also watch my video about the SEND system and my thoughts on the changes that are needed [here](#).

Hampshire parents who will be applying for School Transport or Post-16 Transport from September 2026 need to do so shortly, so that arrangements can be in place for the start of the new academic year. Applications are currently open for secondary pupils in mainstream schools and children or Post-16 students with SEND. Applications for mainstream primary pupils will be opening on 16th April. More information about the process and deadlines is available [here](#).



March also marked World Book Day, and the occasion shed light on existing concerns with childhood reading rates. Reading for pleasure is the single biggest indicator of a child's future success, yet it is in crisis.

I always enjoyed reading to my sons when they were little and I hope they did too, it has certainly helped in-still in them a lifelong love of books.

As Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, I am also looking into the role of TV and video content in children's development and education.

So far, [we heard from the BBC](#) about their work in commissioning children's TV and [from YouTube](#) about the impact of their algorithms on children. You can follow the progress of this inquiry [here](#).

In this role I was honoured to receive the Outstanding Contribution Award from the Music Venue Trust at this year's Venues Day. Grassroots music venues play a huge role in local communities in terms of cultural development, cohesion and economic growth. They also provide training opportunities to rising stars and without them global headliners such as Ed Sheeran and Oasis may never have had the chance to hone their skills. The Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee has been pushing endlessly for the Government to realise that we need to implement workable solutions to stop venues from closing at an alarming rate.

I continued this conversation with Louis at Quay West Studios on my visit with Cllr Zoe Huggins this month. We explored how to grow the live music scene in the Gosport Constituency and checked out the wonderful church setting where all the magic happens. I left confident that it is one of the most impressive venues on the South Coast. If you would like to find out more about the events that are taking place at Quay West Studios in the next couple of weeks, you can have a look [here](#).



To celebrate English Tourism Week, I popped to the Diving Museum, to see the museum Director, Cllr Kevin Casey, alongside the National Lottery Heritage Fund bosses, Eilish McGuinness and Selina Papa. The Diving Museum is in the final stages of renovation, and this historic bastion will be reopening in May.



This is the only museum dedicated to diving in the country and is supported by a lovely team of volunteers. This fascinating heritage site is a great addition to our local area.

Back in Parliament I was very happy to meet Jimmy, one of the finalists of Visit England Tourism Superstar awards. Jimmy is an 87-year-old volunteer at Raby Castle in the North East who does a wonderful job supporting this English Heritage site. A big thank you to all volunteers, across our country, who contribute their time and energy to look after our heritage.

I also met with England football legend (and I'm a Celebrity winner) Jill Scott, to discuss the Fields in Trust's #ARightNotAPrivilege campaign. The Government's planning reforms threaten to remove Sport England as a statutory consultee – a crucial voice standing up for green spaces and playing fields in the planning process. I will continue pushing the Government to rethink this, so that environment across Gosport, Lee-on-the-Solent, Stubbington, and Hill Head can be protected. You can read more about the campaign [here](#).



I am so pleased for the Jessie Leigh Dance & Cheer Academy achieving outstanding results in Houston, Texas. The King Cats and Vic1ous were both crowned NCA Champions, with Vic1ous placed 4th out of more than 1,700 teams, winning a Golden Ticket to the US Finals. Congratulations to the athletes, coaches and families who worked so hard to let Gosport shine on the world stage.

It was lovely to see another local champion, Luke Haile, the WorldSkills UK medal winner, in Parliament. Luke won a silver medal in the Air Conditioning category of the global competition in 2024, and I was curious to hear what opportunities have emerged following his brilliant performance. You can find out more about the competition [here](#).

It is always great to hear about individuals who go above and beyond for the local community, so a big thank you is due to Elizabeth from the Big Match Fundraising for installing her latest defibrillator at C2U on the High Street. There are now 20 defibrillators across Gosport and more than 60 in the wider region. If you are interested in Liz's work and fundraising efforts, please check out the website [here](#).



I am also very grateful to the remarkable team at Tudor Lodge Care Home who do such a great job of looking after their residents. At a celebration of their new Veteran Friendly Accreditation status, I was joined by the new Commanding Officer of HMS Collingwood, Captain John Cromie, and a group of soldiers and airmen who added something truly special to the occasion (*photo by Richard Bucksey*).



It was useful to meet with Capita to get an update on the Civil Service Pension Scheme and their stewardship of Navy training at HMS Sultan & HMS Collingwood. The team is working to tackle the pension backlog, and I will keep you updated with all developments.

The Government's rhetoric, especially in relation to the defence sector, is a matter of serious concern.

Defence spending needs to go up to reflect the challenges of the modern world, and I stressed the need for urgent action at the Spring Statement in Parliament. You can watch my exchange with the Chancellor [here](#).

I popped by to show support to Paul, Brandon, Kev, and Alison who were sleeping rough on Stokes Bay as part of The Great Tommy Sleep campaign by the Royal British Veterans Enterprise to raise money for homeless veterans.

The work at Haslar Immigration Removal Centre is in full swing, so I filmed an explainer of what is happening over the coming months. You can watch it [here](#).

In related news, Gosport Borough Council has now sold Fort Road Car Park and the land to the south-east of the site to the Home Office. This decision was taken in a secret meeting and there are concerns about whether it is lawful under the Council's own standing orders. You can read my thoughts on this and have a look at the letter that our local Conservative councillors have submitted opposing this move [here](#). More about the proposal itself is available [here](#).

In the Chamber, I voiced my opposition to the Government's plans to increase fuel duty. It is set to rise by 5p per litre over the next year at times when events

in the Middle East are destabilising fuel prices. You can listen to my contribution in the Chamber [here](#) and sign the petition [here](#).

Alongside our Police and Crime Commissioner, Donna Jones, I met with bereaved families who were impacted by the extremely disturbing case of Elkin & Bell Funeral Directors. I updated them on the [debate that I held in Parliament](#) on this issue and the Government's response and action to date. It is clear that we must introduce robust legislation to ensure that instances of mistreatment of a deceased person never happen again. If you want to be kept up to date on this work, please get in touch.



Local updates to be aware of:

The Government has now selected its preferred option for Local Government Reorganisation across Hampshire - option 1A. In this scenario, Gosport Borough Council would be abolished and replaced with a new council covering Gosport, Fareham, Havant, Portsmouth and parts of Winchester. In my submission to the consultation, I was clear that Gosport must see evident economic benefits and real improvements to local services.

Residents contacted me about Gosport Borough Council's Local Plan and the impact its implementation will have on the Rowner area. A small part of Rowner has again been identified as potentially suitable for regeneration, but this does not mean the Council is planning to demolish residents' homes. I posted a short explainer about this [here](#) and if you have any issues, please let me know.

Regular readers will be aware that Rowner is set to receive up to £20 million through the Pride and Place programme and the funding will be delivered by a new Neighbourhood Board with the involvement of local people. Recruitment for an independent Chair is ongoing, and the application window closed on 22nd March. Interviews are going ahead this week, and I will keep you in the loop with all developments.

The ownership of Gosport Ferry has been transferred from Falkland Islands Holdings to Thames Clippers. I met with both teams and was assured that there are no job losses or changes to service levels as a result of this decision. I also heard that ways of improving the ticketing system are being assessed.

I asked the Minister for Care, Stephen Kinnock MP, to provide much needed support to access the capital funds needed to improve the facilities at Stubbington Surgery. The team and the quality of service provided are absolutely brilliant, but they urgently need more space. You can watch my question and the Minister's response [here](#).

I welcome that the Government decided to prioritise new dental schools like Portsmouth's when allocating 50 new training places. Locally, we currently have a dental desert, and I have been pushing for three years for the University of Portsmouth to be permitted to gain Dental School status and train more dentists in our area.

To discuss any of the above, you are welcome to join the next Facebook Live Q&A that I will be holding with local Conservative councillors in April (check my social media for updates). The first one took place a couple of weeks ago alongside Cllr Stephen Philpott and Cllr Zoe Huggins and you can watch the recording [here](#). As we received a lot of positive feedback and interest, we decided to do it again!

I have been extremely concerned by the latest developments in the Middle East, and my team have been working hard to support local residents trapped abroad by the rapidly developing situation. If you know anyone who is still in need of assistance, please contact the FCDO's 24/7 Consular Hotline on +44 (0)20 7008 5000.



All that remains is to wish you and your loved ones a very Happy Easter! I was lucky to bump into the Easter Bunny at C2U on Gosport High Street. Their Easter Experience runs until Saturday 4th April between 11:30 and 13:30 each day.

So that's it for March! As ever, my team and I are here for any questions, thoughts or concerns you may have.

Please do get in touch via caroline.dinenage.mp@parliament.uk.

Best wishes
Caroline Dinenage

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