

News bulletin – 11 March 2013

This is the news bulletin for Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton Pavilion and features highlights of her work in Parliament and in the constituency last week. For more information, please visit <http://www.carolinelucas.com/>

Justice and Security Bill

The main business in Parliament last week was the Justice and Security Bill and I spoke to several of my amendments, the bulk of which were trying to completely overturn Part 2 of the Bill – the part which allows secret courts to be used in civil cases. I argued that secret courts – or closed materials procedures as they are called in the legislation – are incompatible with basic principles of justice, are completely unnecessary and will undermine rather than promote national security. Closed Material Procedures would give Ministers the ability to exclude their opponents from the court room, along with the press and the public, and present a one-sided case to the judge, free of effective challenge. The reasons for any outcome in the case would then remain secret.

I am not alone on my views. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has published expert legal advice finding that secret courts are “incompatible with the common law right to a fair trial” and “incompatible with article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights”. 702 figures from the legal profession, including 40 QCs, have also stated that the proposals in the Government’s Justice and Security Bill to allow a huge extension of court hearings behind closed doors will “erode core principles of our civil justice system” and , if allowed to go ahead, “will fatally undermine the court room as an independent and objective forum in which allegations of wrongdoing can be fairly tested and where the Government can be transparently held to account.” And hundreds of constituents have contacted me to express their opposition to secret courts and to the Justice and Security Bill.

My amendments were not voted upon, owing to delays on other votes. However, the entire Bill was subject to a vote at what’s known as the Third Reading stage. Because the proposals for secret courts remained in the legislation I voted against it. Only 14 other MPs did so and I was hugely disappointed that, with a few honourable exceptions, Labour abstained and that Liberal Democrats backed the Bill despite their party members having strong policy again secret courts.

You can read my contribution to the debate [here](#).

Vernon Terrace Elm Tree

Last week I visited those campaigning to save the elm tree on Vernon Terrace, spending a couple of hours with residents and listening to their concerns.

I don't believe a case has been made for the tree to be removed, and I therefore opposed the plans to fell it. The discussions I have had, and the volume of correspondence I have received, make it clear that the tree is much loved and valued by the local community, and that many were unaware that the tree would be felled as part of the Seven Dials Improvement Plan. I made this case very strongly to the Council and am pleased that the Council has listened to the concern felt by the local community, and that a stay of execution has now been granted. However, I am mindful that things remain a little uncertain and I am seeking more information about the length of the pause. I am also asking how residents will be able to put forward further ideas from this point, eg, plans for further consultation/public meeting etc.



Meeting local residents at the Seven Dials elm this week

NHS Privatisation

As an update on the NHS regulations mentioned in the last bulletin, Lib Dem Health Minister Norman Lamb has announced that the Government is backtracking on the controversial regulations that would have forced almost all health services to be opened up to private bidders. I was with campaigners outside Parliament at the time and responded by saying: "This eleventh hour rewrite is a clear acknowledgment by the Government that its policy in this area is a complete disaster... But although this shambolic backtracking on Section 75 will come as a relief to everyone fighting tooth and nail against NHS privatisation, this is not the end of the story. The Coalition has shown that it is determined to push ahead with plans for bringing the market into the NHS. So we must now remain vigilant to all further attempts to put company profits before the health of the British people."

I also spoke last week at a very well attended Defend the NHS public meeting at the Friends Meeting House in Brighton.

Biodiversity

I asked the DEFRA Minister about his refusal to ban neonicotinoids for the harm they cause to bees and other wildlife. Here's the exchange in full:

Caroline Lucas: Last week the Secretary of State said that he was keen to delay European Union proposals to protect essential pollinators from neonicotinoids until new British field data were available. At the very same time, his own chief scientist was telling members of the Environmental Audit Committee that those same trials had been deeply compromised. When will the Secretary of State stop prevaricating and implement a moratorium on the use of neonicotinoids without further delay?

Owen Paterson: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making the position clear. There have been a number of reports based on laboratory data. I have raised the issue with Minister Coveney, who has the presidency of the European Union, and had a meeting with Commissioner Borg about it only last

week. We have asked them to wait until the data from our field trials have been analysed. We are fully aware of the strength of feeling that the hon. Lady represents, but there are also people who believe that these materials are not damaging. What is absolutely critical is that we do the right thing for bees, because they play such a fundamental role. There is no point in removing one product if it does not actually hurt bees. What we really need to do is look at how we can promote bee health, because it is so important to all plant life.

Regular readers will know this is one of my key campaigns and hundreds of constituents have contacted me about the importance of a bee action plan. Despite saying in the reply above that he wants to promote bee health, the Minister won't commit to introducing a bee action plan encouraging agricultural reform to protect habitats, addressing use of pesticides (including suspending the use of those pesticides linked to bee deaths), establishing firm conservation guidelines by including bees as a priority in the Biodiversity 2020 Strategy, ensuring that further planning policy protects designated wildlife sites that are important to bees, and extending the Bee Health Programme to address the health of all bees. What's more, the action plan Ministers have to produce under EU law to reduce pesticide use contains no targets or timetable – leading to it being dubbed an 'inaction plan'.

Some sad news about polar bears too. The UK had agreed to back a bid for these animals to be listed in Appendix One of what's known as CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) which would have given them protected species status and resulted in a ban on international commercial trade of polar bears. However, the UK had to vote as part of an EU bloc and other European countries did not agree with this position. The EU therefore abstained and the proposal was not successful. If the issue is raised at the next CITES conference the UK could make the difference in terms of winning others over if it indicates that it is supportive from an earlier stage. So I will be keeping up pressure on Ministers to do just this.

International Women's Day

On March 8th, International Women's Day, I hosted a roundtable with local women's organisations on media sexism to launch a new campaign urging people to report local examples they come across, which will then be published in a report for Ministers. Attending were groups such as Rise, Brighton & Hove Women Against Cuts, Brighton and Hove Muslim Women's Group and Brighton Voices In Exile's Women's Group. You can read more about the initiative here, including how to take part: <http://www.carolinelucas.com/media/international-womens-day-2013-does-sexism-in-the-press-make-you-angry.html> I also spoke at an excellent IWD event at the Dome to celebrate International Women's Day, and at an event on Green economics at Brighton University. Finally, I was invited to a fringe event at the Lib Dem Conference in Brighton to discuss my Private Member's Bill on Land Value Taxation.

Other news

Last week in Parliament I asked the Government to allow a debate on the case of Shaker Aamer, the last British resident of Guantanamo Bay detention centre who remains there after 11 years without trial – despite the fact he has been cleared for release by both UK and US authorities. I was also a keynote speaker at a lunch time discussion hosted by the Institute for Economic Affairs – you can read a copy of my remarks [here](#) – and spoke at Student Pride in Brighton and Hove last weekend. As a patron of Brighton and Hove Carers Centre, I was pleased to host a visit to Parliament for some local carers, who took part in a tour and joined me at a protest to save the NHS. I also took part in an action to mark [WWF's Earth Hour](#).

Contacting me

If you are a local resident and want help with case work or to find out more about my activities locally please contact me at the office of Caroline Lucas MP, Brighton Media Centre 15-17 Middle Street, Brighton BN1 1AL. Tel: 01273 201 130. Email: brightonoffice@parliament.uk

I hold regular surgeries across the constituency. If you want to book an appointment at a forthcoming surgery please call Liz Collis on 01273 201130. She coordinates my constituency office and is able to help with most local enquiries.

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