



# WEALDEN CONSERVATIVES NEWS

APRIL 2022

## Book Your Tickets Now

### April 29th - Drinks & Canapés with Sir Graham Brady MP

**Last chance to book - Only a few tickets remaining**

A long serving MP and currently Chairman of the Conservative 1922 Back Bench Committee so in the news with Conservative MPs concerned about 'Partygate'.

Come and hear what he has to say.

This Event is at Hendall Manor Barns, Herons Ghyll, Uckfield and is open to all Association members.

Tickets available online or call the Office on 01273 937661 - price £30.



## A Thai supper with ...

Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP  
Minister of State for Trade Policy  
Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May Thai Terre, Uckfield



This event is open to all Association members. A chance to meet this fascinating MP currently Minister of State for Trade Policy who has held a variety of previous posts including Secretary of State for International Development and Secretary of State for Defence. To be held at Thai Terre Restaurant, High Street, Uckfield. The entire restaurant has been booked to include a delicious menu at a very special price. Free parking is available to the rear in Regency Close car park.

Tickets available online or call the Office on 01273 937661 - price £35 (excluding drinks).

## Save the date ...



### The Association AGM

will be held on Friday 17th June 2022

at Uckfield Civic Centre, 7.30pm.

*An agenda pack will be sent to members*

[www.wealdenconservatives.com](http://www.wealdenconservatives.com)



## News from the Polish/Ukrainian Border

### A report from Toby Illingworth

#### Wealden Conservative Association Chairman



In early April I was standing on the Ukrainian border, witnessing sights that haven't been seen in Europe since the Balkan wars 30 years ago.

About a month ago, I put out a message on our local community Facebook groups asking if anyone was interested in some assistance in finding a refugee family to sponsor. I naively expected to receive a handful of responses and, through my Ukrainian friends, easily be able to pair them with Ukrainian families in need. Within a very short space of time we had space for over 150 Ukrainians and concluded that my plan needed to change.

After recruiting a friend from the village, we set off for the Ukrainian border, intending to plug into a UK NGO there to find our matches. We arrived at Przemyśl Humanitarian Centre about 20 minutes' drive from the border to a scene that I will never forget. As we entered the building, a condemned Tesco store, the first thing that hits you is the smell, something I have since discovered is irremovable from your clothes, of 4-5000 humans who have not washed or had proper facilities for days. The crowds of mainly women and children who had lost everything, left with only the clothes on their back, and a sense of utter despair was completely overwhelming.



At the back of the centre, there was a row of tables each draped in the flags of various countries providing registration for transport to each respective European country. Every country had queues of hundreds of refugees registering for buses and transport, except one, there, empty, stood the UK stand. The UK is the only country in Europe asking for visas and, whilst I personally agree with the concept of sponsorship and recording who is staying where, the complexity means that the vast majority are choosing to travel anywhere else.

When we had waded through the crowds eagerly awaiting travel to other parts of Europe and reached the UK desk it became immediately apparent that there was no effective operation in place to explain the UK process, assist with matching sponsors and helping complete the forms. The group there had on average completed fewer than 10 visa applications a day, out of about 5000 refugees every 24 hours. The whole situation was utterly disheartening and we felt, for a moment, the whole trip had been a wasted journey.

It was at this moment that we happened to bump into two incredible women, one a military wife called Sarah and the other a young student from Bristol called Eleanor. Both had independently turned up to volunteer, both were frustrated by the issues with the UK process. It was clear that there was a possibility of setting up a system to provide a process to support Ukrainians leaving their country and seeking refuge here in the UK.

Over the course of the next couple of days, we had meetings with other Brits, including an organisation called Make A Difference Foundation, also committed to do their bit to establish a process and we came up with a plan. This Saturday we had the first meeting, by zoom, of our team. They are based in Kharkiv, Kyiv, Przemyśl, Krakow and the UK. We have put in place an organisation that is; Delivering aid to the front line such as in Donbas, extracting refugees from there to Kyiv and Lviv and on to Poland, finding and matching sponsors, providing translation services, helping Ukrainians complete the complex visa forms, finding temporary accommodation in Poland and providing transport for them to the UK. We are the only group operating around the front line where the situation is beyond dire and the only organisation providing assistance from extraction to sponsor family in the UK.

I am so grateful for your supportive messages in reaction to the press coverage of our program, but wanted to clarify a few things:

As mentioned above, I am supportive of the visa/sponsorship process, it provides a level of safeguarding that is unavailable in any other country in Europe. While in Poland, we had to help a woman and two children who already had a sponsor in the UK, she had found temporary accommodation in Poland and was raped, in front of her 10 year old son, by the man who was providing said accommodation. The sponsorship program provides criminal checks and more accountability.

The visa process is, however, far too complicated, repetitive and impractical for those on the ground and for Ukrainians trying to complete them. Each form takes a couple of hours to complete and a separate form is needed for each individual, rather than for a family unit. I have not been afraid to call out the Home Office on this as it is unnecessary and wrong. The visas are taking far too long to be processed and approved. It is currently taking between 1-3 weeks to complete them causing a logistical nightmare for arranging temporary accommodation in Poland and onward travel. The HO has committed to reducing this to 48 hours within the next couple of weeks, but this must happen faster.



The Homes for Ukraine scheme is not known about by Ukrainians. They have never heard of it, they do not know how to find a sponsor and the literature is only available in English and Ukrainian. 30% of Ukrainians speak Russian not Ukrainian and so they are automatically disadvantaged. The solution to this is to have a presence across Ukraine and at every border with appropriate literature, which we are going to be providing.

In the UK, many people are unaware that by signing up to the Homes for Ukraine scheme, this does not mean that the government will provide them with a family to sponsor. The solution to this is the Government asking if those who register are happy for their details to be shared with registered NGO's on the border. In the meantime, if you are looking for a family to sponsor, please use the link to the Operation Safe Drop website below.

I have been very critical of the Home Office and I feel this is justified, however, on the ground in a place called Rzeszow, we met the most amazing team of Home Office staff who were going well above and beyond their brief from London, doing everything they could to help and are now working closely with our organisation.

In conclusion, I am proud of what we have achieved in such a short space of time, proud that it is a team from Wealden that is leading sorting this issue out and grateful for all your support. If you would like help finding a family to host, are willing to contribute to our work via our registered charity or are willing to volunteer in the UK or at the Ukrainian border, please visit our website at: [www.madfoundation.com](http://www.madfoundation.com)

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## Other Dates For Your Diary

### June 9th - Patrons Event - with the Right Honourable Jacob Rees Mogg MP

Drinks & canapés at a The Coach House, Framfield Place, Framfield by kind permission of Mr & Mrs R A Marten. This event will be free to Patron members but a limited number of tickets will be available to ordinary members @ £50 per person - contact the Association Office on 01273 937661 for booking.

### 18th November - Premier Dinner Returns - The Right Honourable Elizabeth Truss MP

The current Foreign Secretary and former Lord Chancellor under Teresa May has agreed to attend. Provisionally to be held at the East Sussex National Hotel.

## More Wealden Council News

### Planning - Council Wins Several Appeals

The Conservative Group on Wealden District Council support controlled housing development but want to preserve the rural environment and the Council have won a number of recent Planning Appeals.

Developers submitted plans for 40 houses in Ninfield in 2020. Planning was refused by the District Council as the site was in open countryside and it was felt the development would be detrimental to the visual and rural setting of the village. The developers appealed but lost as the inspector supported the Council's view.

The Council have also won an appeal at Maresfield where developers were proposing eight 6-bedroomed houses on land adjoining The Drive. The Council have also won another appeal in Blackboys where the inspector dismissed a developers plans to construct nine new houses on land adjacent to the recreation ground.

Two further appeals have been won by Wealden District Council. One was in Buxted where two house had been proposed in Howbourne Lane. The other was a proposal to convert Holy Rood Church in Pevensey Bay with additional houses in the grounds.

Councillor Ann Newtown, the portfolio holder for planning, said: 'Unacceptable development that does not accord with our policies and guidance will be refused. These decisions will be defended at appeal'.

### Long Serving Council Leader Stands Down

Wealden District Council leader, Conservative councillor Bob Standley, has announced he is standing down as leader of the authority in May.

Councillor Standley, who has represented Frant and Wadhurst since first being elected in 2004, is stepping down at a Conservative Group AGM later this month.

During his 18 years as a district councillor – and a dozen years as council leader – Councillor Standley has overseen a programme that reduced the council's costs, improved the wellbeing and quality of life for Wealden residents and ensured the authority is in a strong position to enable continued excellent delivery of services to residents.

He has also been at the forefront of delivering major capital projects within Wealden including the creation of Sussex Weald Homes Ltd in 2017, which delivers smaller family homes and contributes to keeping council tax as low as possible; overseeing a £7m leisure centre refurbishment programme; creating Wealden Crematorium in 2020. He has been leading on the plan for a 40 acre employment park near Hailsham, which is forecast to create hundreds of jobs for local people over the next 10 years.

Councillor Standley has also been continuously lobbying government and senior ministers to reduce the number of homes Wealden council is obliged to provide across the district.

Councillor Standley will continue to serve on East Sussex County Council where he sits on the Cabinet as lead member for Education Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and represents the Wealden North-East division which includes Frant, Wadhurst, Hadlow Down and Rotherfield.



The Wealden Conservatives Officer Team are keen to produce these Newsletters on a more regular basis and are happy to include details of Branch events for promotion to the wider membership. News items and other items of interest will also be welcome.

**We want to hear from you.**

Please send to: [newsletter@wealdenconservatives.com](mailto:newsletter@wealdenconservatives.com).

Editor Chris Lawson