

Sir David speaks in the Christmas Adjournment Debate

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Thursday, 17 December, 2020



On Thursday 17 December, Sir David Amess, MP for Southend West, spoke in the annual Summer Adjournment Debate before the House of Commons rose for Christmas recess.

Sir David took the opportunity to raise a number of constituent concerns and national issues including Southend Airport, c2c, the local Police and Fire Services, local charities and Southend's bid to become a city.

Sir David said "It is a pleasure to follow such a moving speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce). This has been an absolutely rotten year—the worst that I can ever remember—and I think every one of us will be glad to see the back of it, but before we adjourn for the Christmas recess, there are a number of points I wish to make.

Many of my constituents were absolutely fed up with C2C's reorganisation of the timetable, resulting in people being crammed together. This was not good enough, but I hope to see further improvements under the new chief executive, Ben Ackroyd.

Southend airport is wonderful, and regional airports need more support, but my constituents are getting fed up with being woken up in the wee hours of the morning by Amazon flights. It really is not acceptable to be woken up in the wee hours of the morning in that way. I was very disappointed to learn that Arriva UK Bus has withdrawn the new eco-friendly service in Southend and replaced it with old polluting buses. That is ridiculous and needs to be changed.

Southend United have been having a tough old time. We were, I think, bottom by about nine points, but I am delighted to tell the House we have just beaten Scunthorpe and we are now only bottom by one. So things are improving, and perhaps we can celebrate with a new stadium.

Like all other hon. Members, I wish to congratulate Southend clinical commissioning group, the staff at Southend University Hospital and the director of public health at Southend-on-Sea Borough Council for all their hard work in co-ordinating the local response to covid-19. Both the hospital and our local ambulance service have been absolutely wonderful, as all hon. Members should say; my goodness, they deserve a wonderful Christmas. I was very disappointed when Nazareth House closed, but I am delighted to say that it is now being used as a coronavirus testing centre, so the ethos of caring still remains there.

With the Belvedere on Leigh Cliffs, too much money has been wasted on a project that is a magnet for drug abuse and antisocial behaviour. That is just getting worse, but I praise the wonderful work of Leigh-on-Sea Town Council, under the chairmanship of Councillor Paul Gilson, who has been working with local community groups such as Friends of Love Leigh Cliffs and Essex police to tackle antisocial behaviour in Leigh and along the cliffs.

On roads and parking, we really need to do something about the quality of the roads in Southend, and the local council should work even harder to reduce speeding. I applaud the fact that they are providing free parking in the town centre over Christmas, but we need better signage.

I am delighted that my constituent Lakhbir Sandhu, who was imprisoned in Czechoslovakia for many months, is now free and celebrating his freedom with constituents, thanks to the wonderful work of the British ambassador and a wonderful legal team.

We have a marvellous hospice in Southend, Fair Havens, which is really under pressure at the moment. I congratulate all the staff there. I always associate the wonderful Salvation Army with Christmas, although it works 365 days a year, and I look forward to the progress of its Project Malachi, creating temporary accommodation for people experiencing homelessness.

It was crazy to close our churches earlier in the year, frankly. They were so careful about social distancing and all that. That must never happen again—people who go to church should be allowed to do so.

As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on endometriosis, I was pleased that we launched our report in October. It has made a big difference for people. My hon. Friend the

Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) is vice-chairman of the group, and we want to ensure that the voices of the 1.5 million ladies who suffer from this illness are heard.

Unfortunately, one of my constituents lost her granddaughter, Maisie Tohill—this is terrible to cope with—to sudden unexpected death as a result of epilepsy. The Tohills have started a charity in her name, the Maisie Tohill Foundation. SUDEP Action recently published its report on sudden unexpected death in epilepsy, and I hope that the Government will act on its recommendations.

Southend's HARP does a wonderful job in reducing rough sleeping in Southend. Some 80% of those who were temporarily housed in bed and breakfasts have now found long-term accommodation. They really are pulling their lives around. I also praise Prost8, a wonderful local charity, and particularly its founder Paul Sayer. Last Friday, I welcomed—socially distanced, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker—a number of charities, including the citizens advice bureau. They have had a very difficult year, but they have absolutely stepped up to the mark.

Our police locally are wonderful, and I am delighted to say that Southend has seen a 10.3% reduction in crime year on year and a 12.8% reduction in victim-based crime. Essex County Fire and Rescue Service has done a wonderful job in inspecting all the high-rise buildings with cladding over the past few months, and I am glad to hear that low-rise blocks are also going to be inspected and remedial work recommended where necessary.

Unfortunately, for obvious reasons, we could not physically hold our annual centenarians' tea party. We did it virtually, and that was a wonderful experience, but I hope we will be able to reinstate it next year, and we are going to do our best to once again get into the Guinness World Records.

Now, on city status— [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear!"] There should be a city-status competition for the Queen's jubilee in 2022, so that Southend can become a city. She is probably sick to death of seeing statues of herself, but I think there should be yet another statue of the Queen in the vicinity of Buckingham Palace and the Palace of Westminster, to celebrate the fact that not only is it her platinum jubilee but she is the longest-serving Head of State in the world.

I have had a number of ambassadorial meetings by Zoom this year, and I praise the work of the ambassadors to the Philippines and the Maldives, which is in a far better place now.

I pay tribute to the wonderful work of Steve Tinning with the charity Safe Passage. I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), for arranging a meeting.

I am delighted that the Government have at long last announced a ban on live animal exports in England and Wales. The next thing on the list will be to stop the farrowing of sows in crates, which is very cruel. Thankfully, zoos can currently remain open in certain tiers.

Remembrance Day and VJ Day were very muted this year. Perhaps rather ambitiously, I organised a live VJ Day broadcast—I am not sure that I will ever do that again; it is much better to record it. We celebrated both events and I hope we will be able to do much more

next year. Peter Egan narrated the history of the conflict in the far east and it was absolutely wonderful.

Chase High School is a wonderful school in my constituency, and I was delighted to be there to see the opening of the Geoff Nash building.

I have one constituent who has been on and on at me about the relationship between coronavirus deaths and medicines such as steroids, which, according to this constituent, can lower the immune system and make infections more likely. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to make sure that we get a reply from the Department of Health and Social Care on that.

The high street, and particularly independent shops, have had an incredibly difficult time. I welcomed the opening of a new shop called Balloonacy. We should all try to shop locally.

This year we lost a wonderful woman and a national treasure: Dame Vera Lynn. I am in constant contact with her daughter Ginny, and there are all sorts of people behind this project. I know that statues are controversial, but we must get a statue of Dame Vera Lynn. There are very few statues of women and it has to be in the best place possible so that future generations can enjoy and appreciate the wonderful work that she did.

I offer you, Madam Deputy Speaker, the team under the Speaker and everyone who works here a very happy Christmas and a far better 2021”.