

## OPINION



## In The House

with Huw Merriman  
MP for Bexhill and Battle

# It's clear we must listen to the message sent to us by voters

**M**y last column was written whilst I was out delivering voting reminders on polling day.

It was lovely to meet so many people and discuss matters of importance to them. In the constituency, we had elections for Wealden and Rother District Councils. I want to congratulate all who were elected, commiserate with all who were not elected and pay particular tribute to the many years of public service from those who either retired or were not returned to office. These tireless public servants deserve our gratitude, regardless of our political views.

After the polls closed, I joined Laura Kuenssberg for the overnight shift on BBC1. It meant getting up at 2.30am and heading to Broadcasting House. It was, as I mentioned many times, a difficult night for the Government.

This was the first time voters had the opportunity to give their views on the changes over the last 12 months. It's clear that we must

listen and get our heads down to deliver on matters which will ease the cost of living and grow the economy.

I believe that this Government is focussed on what matters to people, but also recognise we have a lot to do to restore faith.

After I came off air, I walked to Paddington to unveil a train to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles. I was on duty over the weekend to ensure transport went smoothly. It did so. I hope you enjoyed the spectacular service and had a great Coronation celebration.

Back to the elections, this was the first time voters were required to show photo ID at polling stations. This could be a passport, driving licence, bus pass, or certificate for the few who have no photo ID. We've brought checks in to reduce electoral fraud. Recommended by the independent Electoral Commission, it's standard practice in most European countries. In the UK, voters in

Northern Ireland have had to show ID when voting for the past 20 years in a move introduced by the last Labour government. Ensuring our electoral system is secure is vital to a healthy democracy.

It's clear that, in the South East, housebuilding played a part in election results. In the constituency, we saw Greens, Liberal Democrats and Independents make the most gains. Pledges to reduce housebuilding may appear attractive but come with a cost to those in their 20s and 30s who want to get on the housing ladder. District Councils must still provide housing for local people and the need for affordable housing is essential, especially in districts like Rother where average wages are low compared to the rest of the south east.

The aspiration of homeownership is a fundamental value I support. It provides greater security and people become more rooted in their communities. Current-

ly, too many people are being prevented from getting on the housing ladder as their parents' generation did.

Nationally, progress has been made in getting new houses built with 2.2 million being built since 2010. In 2021-22, more than 230,000 were delivered in England. This was the third highest number of new homes delivered annually in over three decades, topped only by the figures for the two years preceding the pandemic. However, far too many people are on the waiting list or being priced out. Supply is not meeting demand.

The Government rightly recognises too that not everybody is a homeowner. Locally, we have many people in the private rental sector. The Renters' (Reform) Bill, which was introduced to Parliament on Wednesday, offers greater protections. For renters, the Bill will deliver on the Government's manifesto commitment to abolish Section 21 evictions, also

known as 'no fault' evictions. For landlords, reforms will make it easier to recover properties, including when tenants wilfully do not pay rent, and reduce notice periods where tenants have been irresponsible, such as causing damage to properties.

There was also good news for bus passengers announced on Wednesday. To help people save on everyday travel costs, the Government has announced up to £200 million will be provided to continue capping single bus fares at £2 outside of London until the end of October. Single fares will then increase by 50p and be capped until 30 November 2024.

Buses are vital for many local people travelling across our constituency. During the pandemic, usage dropped as low as 10% of pre-pandemic levels and, while passenger levels have recovered to around 85-90%, the fare cap aims to encourage people back on the bus, which can help reduce congestion and emissions.