

## FROM YOUR MP

On 4th April of this year, I wrote to Chris Grayling MP, the Transport Secretary, to ask to meet with him urgently so he could assure me that the Government was not considering using the M26 as part of a solution to Operation Stack. I made clear to him that, should it be tried, it would be an unworkable solution, and asked him to let me know if ever it was seriously considered. I also asked for a thorough consultation with residents.

Unfortunately, I never received a response to my letter, and heard no more about it until a few weeks ago, when speaking with Highways England. I asked them numerous times whether they were considering using the M26 as a lorry park. Like the Department for Transport earlier that year, they said it wasn't even in the picture.

You can therefore imagine my frustration and disbelief when works began a few weeks ago with absolutely no warning and no consultation. Later that evening, I received a call from Highways England, who confirmed to me that the Department for Transport had been instructed to begin works to increase the lorry holding capacity on the M26, contrary to what they had said just days before.

I immediately raised this with Chris Grayling in the House of Commons, to ask why works had begun to turn the M26 into a parking lot, with no consultation and no warning. Unsurprisingly, he could not give me an answer.

Since then I have held an adjournment debate on the matter, had numerous meetings with the Roads Minister, Jesse Norman, and made clear to the Transport Secretary that this was an unworkable idea.

Although he apologised and said that these plans would be a last resort, I made clear to him that the local infrastructure could not cope with the plans without investment, particularly with the missing slip roads at Junction 5. The impact on villages like Platt, as well as the wider area, could be significant, and would need to be given serious consideration.

I will not let this drop. The plan is poor and the handling is worse. I will continue to be in close contact with the Department for Transport to make the case for our communities, and keep you updated. The M26 is unsuitable for holding HGVs and I will do all I can to ensure it comes off the plans.

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