Wealden
District Council

Nusrat Ghani MP
MP for Sussex Weald and Deputy Speaker
And Chairman of Ways and Means
House of Commons
Palace of Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

By email.

23 July 2026
[redacted]@wealden.gov.uk
www.wealden.gov.uk
01323 443322

Dear Nusrat

Subject: Crowborough Training Camp.

Thank you for your letter of 21 July.

Before I turn to the detail of your letter, I would like to take a moment to reflect on the communications between us. You have repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with our work as a council. Sadly, this has come with much misinformation and false accusation, which is unsettling for our community and does not serve the public good. Rather than using your status to criticise local politicians, it would be far more constructive to advocate in Parliament for our community, and for this authority, as only a Member of Parliament can.

Therefore, I would like to ask for clarification about what you have done as our MP to get a change to the law to allow local councils to take planning enforcement action when it involves Crown land. As we have explained several times before, without changing the law about Crown land, planning enforcement action was simply not possible. That is something only Parliament can change and, as our MP representative there, we and residents would have expected you to lobby hard on this point to get this changed.

I welcome constructive suggestions about how we can support Crowborough residents. However, I must correct several inaccurate assertions in your letter.

Street drinking

The Council would, of course, be willing to consider evidence of street drinking and any associated antisocial behaviour in Crowborough.
However, the legal test for introducing a Public Spaces Protection Order cannot be met simply because such behaviour might occur in the future. There must be evidence that the behaviour has had, or is likely to have, a detrimental effect on the quality of life of local people, and that it is persistent or continuing and unreasonable.

I have spoken to officers and, at present, the Council is not aware of evidence demonstrating a significant or continuing street drinking problem in Crowborough, or evidence linking such behaviour to residents of Crowborough Training Camp.

Your letter describes this as an almost certain continuing issue but does not provide evidence to support that conclusion. Do please share the reports, incidents or other evidence on which your concerns are based.

We will then consider this with Crowborough Town Council, Sussex Police and our other partners. The Council will act on evidence, but it would not be appropriate to introduce statutory restrictions based on assumption or speculation.

Planning enforcement

Your statement that the Council failed to take planning enforcement or legal action against the Home Office is incorrect.

The Council served a Planning Contravention Notice and, at the same time, wrote to Government seeking the permission necessary to pursue planning enforcement action. That permission was required because Crowborough Training Camp is Crown land.

Government refused permission. As a direct consequence, the Council had no lawful authority to pursue enforcement action.

It is therefore wrong to portray this as a failure by Wealden District Council. The Council took the action available to it and was prevented from proceeding any further by Government. I ask that you correct this misinformation on any public platforms, as it causes unnecessary anxiety and confusion in our community.

I also reject the suggestion that the Council "naively accepted" Home Office assurances. The Council has consistently challenged the Home Office, sought information, raised concerns and acted within the powers available to it. Personalised language of this nature does not assist residents or encourage effective partnership working.

Potential expansion

The Council is aware of concerns about the possible expansion of Crowborough Training Camp. However, we are not aware of any current proposal, planning application or approach involving adjoining land.

The planning and environmental constraints affecting the site are substantial and well known.

Crowborough Training Camp directly adjoins Ashdown Forest, and parts of the site fall within the 400-metre exclusion zone. The use of existing buildings and land under permitted development rights has been considered in the context of the established use of the military camp.

Any physical expansion onto adjoining land would be considered in a very different planning context. Development would be severely constrained by the Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation, alongside the other national and local planning policies protecting this highly sensitive area.

These protections are longstanding, high profile and publicly available. We are confident that adjoining landowners are aware of the planning constraints affecting land around Ashdown Forest.

In the absence of any identified proposal, it would not be proportionate or appropriate for the Council to write speculatively to every surrounding landowner. The Council will remain alert to any evidence of expansion and will assess any proposal rigorously against the relevant planning and environmental protections.

Government action

There is also a further area where your influence as the constituency MP could make a real practical difference.

The Council has pressed for the conditions attached to Government asylum grant funding to be widened so that funding can be spent directly in Crowborough and for the benefit of the residents and community most affected by the use of the camp.

Please confirm what representations you have made to Government to secure greater flexibility over that funding. Have you raised this specific issue in the House of Commons or directly with Ministers?

As our representative in Parliament, your work towards changing the restrictions on Crown land enforcement and allowing grant funding to be spent directly within Crowborough would deliver considerably more value for residents than incorrectly characterising the Council's actions or its legal powers.

The Council remains willing to work constructively with you, Crowborough Town Council and our partners. That work must, however, be based on evidence, an accurate account of the Council's powers and a clear understanding of where responsibility for change rests.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Cllr Rachel Millward
Leader of Wealden District Council and Portfolio Holder for Community, Culture & Communications
Councillor for Hartfield Ward