We may be heading closer to Brexit Day but my work as a Member of the European Parliament continues with work going on right to the final day. But although my role as your MEP will be ending very shortly, I will still be around [as I always have] campaigning for the Conservative Party and the causes that I believe in. You don’t get rid of me that easily!

Meanwhile, I have been busy with several different projects, both here in the East Midlands and over the water in Brussels.

**War Memorials**

As you may be aware, last year I launched the East Midlands War Memorials Association to coincide with the centenary of the First World War. The Association aims to help reinforce the importance of remembrance through education. I have travelled around the region visiting war memorials, giving talks to local communities, scout groups and schools. We have also produced lesson plans for Key Stages 1, 2 & 3 for teachers to use in schools.

At Conservative Party Conference last year, I held a fringe event where I hosted an exhibition detailing my personal journey from the East Midlands to the Menin Gate in Belgium. I visited war memorials in the UK, France and Belgium which featured angels on them. The exhibition also coincides with a book I have written entitled *Trail of Angels: A Journey of Remembrance from Derbyshire to the Menin Gate*, and if you would like a copy of this, please let me know. I also took this exhibition to the European Parliament in February.

Finally, I was deeply honoured to lead commemorations at the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate in the week leading up to Armistice Day. I read out the exhortation and laid a wreath on behalf of all of those from the East Midlands Regiments who lost their lives in that terrible conflict. It was a moving ceremony, and one I will remember for the rest of my life. As I stood there, I remembered my grandfather and three great uncles, all of whom marched through Ypres on their way to and from the trenches.

**Protecting our Regional Food and Drink**

Last year, I launched the ‘East Midlands Food and Drink Heroes’ campaign to recognise the wonderful food and drink produced in the region.

Not only does this campaign celebrate the high-quality food and drink produced across the East Midlands, through the Heroes Certificates, it also aims to lobby the Government to continue the regional protection schemes which have ensured that specially certified produce are protected from substandard imitations using the same name.

These protections are in place to ensure that Melton Mowbray Pork Pies cannot be made elsewhere or to a lower standard and still be labelled as being “Melton Mowbray”. These protections not only help to preserve the sometimes historical nature of the food and drink but local jobs also.

I have taken the campaign to the Government and have written to the Secretary of State, Rt. Hon Michael Gove MP, as well as setting up a petition on the Government’s website to ensure that the message gets across clearly.

It is vitally important to local jobs that we keep the protections in place following Brexit. I want to see these protections expanded, where reasonably possible, and included within all trade agreements around the world. I believe that we should be proud of our produce and sell it as far and wide as possible – I hope to see Stilton cheese in Korea or Pork Pies in Australia!

**Projekt Hansa**

I have also become Chairman of Projekt Hansa, a group which seeks to look for opportunities for trade and the sharing cultural exports across Northern Europe. Nearly a year on and we have been striving to build a network of like-minded stakeholders across Northern Europe, underpinned by trust, with the ambition to pursue shared economic interests.

Here are some notable highlights from 2018.

* We hosted business hubs and conferences in the East Midlands throughout the year. Nottingham and Boston were just two of the locations where local businesses came together to engage with our Northern European neighbours and discuss the future of exports/imports, the labour market, tourism, and the cultural nuances in foreign markets.
* Focussing on Iceland, as one of our Northern European partners, we held an exhibition on its natural resources in March, followed by an interview with Iceland’s ambassador to the EU Mrs. Bergdís Ellertsdóttir, and the publication of *The view from Iceland - Being Free and Being Free to Trade* by historian and political journalist Hjörtur J. Guðmundsson.
* One of the key issues was the issue of fishing, a crucial aspect of Northern European trade and Brexit. In June, we hosted a debate on the future of fishing trade with Dutch MEP Peter van Dalen and thereafter published *The Future of Fishing*. Both contributions stressed the importance of cooperation and interconnectivity of the fishing markets.

**Finally…**

Earlier this month I was honoured to be selected by Party members in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to be the Party’s candidate for Police and Crime Commissioner for the Leicestershire Force Area. This is an important role that comes with significant responsibilities. I am looking forward to the campaign ahead, which I will be embarking on fully when I step down as my role as MEP. Until then, however, I will remain your MEP, representing the whole of the East Midlands. If you would like to contact me about anything, please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

It has been a privilege to serve you as your MEP. Thank you all for your support over the last two years.

Best wishes,

*Rupert*