

Rt Hon Dr Andrew Murrison MP  
South West Wiltshire

# 2023 in Review



By recent standards, 2023 has been a quiet year. We didn't have a totally deadlocked Parliament, we didn't have to lock ourselves inside for weeks on end, and we didn't face a new war in Europe. That said, the upheavals of Covid, Putin's ongoing war on Ukraine and other global shocks present enduring challenges to our living standards and way of life.

These are difficult times. But I remain heartened by the progress we are making in recovering from the pandemic, leading among our European peers in addressing geopolitical challenges and fostering a dynamic, innovative economy.

South West Wiltshire has seen its fair share of the action with lots of exciting projects, both public and private, lifting off. I am particularly excited about my TechTrowbridge initiative which I launched this year to foster innovation in our county town and bring benefits to Trowbridge and its travel to work area which covers most of my constituency and beyond.

In this review, I have taken a look back at some of the highlights of 2023 serving as your representative. I have also included my responses to major national and international events as well as some of my activity as a defence minister championing British values of decency, tolerance, hard work and respect. It has been an honour to serve as your MP and I will continue to be at your service in 2024.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Murrison".



Much of New Years' Eve and Day was spent unpacking in my new ministerial office. When you become a minister your nice big office in Portcullis House is swapped for a box room closer to the chamber. Despite this rather grand sign, mine is cold, has minimal natural light and intermittent Wi-Fi!

# January

Politics always comes back swinging after the Christmas break. This year was no exception, with the Prime Minister giving a speech launching his five main priorities. I warmly welcomed what he had to say as his are also my constituents' priorities. His statements on the NHS showed this son of a Southampton GP and high street chemist understands the problems caused by flaws in social care, a personal matter to me which I talked about in my blog at the time following the last illness of my mother in law Selma. I began the new year focusing on a wide variety of constituency issues, big and small.

## Constituency highlights

- Opposing plans by Bath & North East Somerset Council to push heavy goods vehicles into Wiltshire through improper use of its clean air zone
- Proposing outreach services to replace the local Post Office which closed with the Westbury McColl's
- Discussing dental care with local providers and lobbying for change to the flawed 'units of dental activity' system
- Advancing my TechTrowbridge campaign with the Swindon & Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Wiltshire College
- Chairing the Trowbridge Place Partnership, convening councillors and community leaders to coordinate plans for development, regeneration and innovation in Trowbridge

## I also

- welcomed the government's focus on community care, getting frail elderly out of acute hospital beds into more appropriate setting in the community, which I addressed in my 2022 Ten Minute Rule Bill.
- celebrated the UK being the first western nation to send tanks to Ukraine
- marked Holocaust Memorial Day by signing the Holocaust Educational Trust Book of Commitment; since then we have had the tragic events of October 7<sup>th</sup>



Welcoming Google to Trowbridge and sharing my TechTrowbridge vision with local entrepreneurs

*'Tech and innovation are the foundations on which the future of our country is being built. I want our county town and its environs to have a slice of the action just as they did during the Industrial Revolution.'*



A key item on the Trowbridge Place Partnership agenda was how the Future High Street Fund award of over £16 million was being spent. In particular, we discussed the money going to the regeneration of the old town hall and the filling of vacant units



Inspecting Gurkha soldiers in Nepal



Signing the Holocaust Educational Trust's Book of Commitment



Northacre Industrial Park, the planned site of the £200 million Westbury incinerator. I immediately condemned the inspectorate's decision as 'horrifying'.

# February

With the launch of my TechTrowbridge campaign and the Westbury incinerators getting planning approval, February was a month of highs and lows. Besides welcoming Google to Trowbridge I was kept busy with local and overseas commitments and had the privilege to meet heroic soldiers from all over the world.

## Constituency highlights

- Hosting a Google Digital Garage event in Trowbridge to kick-start my TechTrowbridge campaign to foster the innovative creative cluster in the county town
- A new cinema and bar opens in Trowbridge's handsome Parade House with the aid of the Future High Street Fund
- More of a lowlight: a planning inspectorate from Bristol gave Northacre Renewable Energy Ltd permission to build an incinerator in Westbury, despite overwhelming local opposition and my efforts to stop it. The fight goes on.
- Visiting Innox Mills in Trowbridge to hear about plans to regenerate the site. Located right next to the train station, this is the first thing you see coming into the town. Transforming it into a living and working space will dramatically improve pride of place.
- Meeting with Seeds4Success, a Mere-based charity giving opportunities to young people
- Calling for a permanent 40mph limit through Chicklade
- Welcoming a rise in the general practice workforce, including 42 more doctors, nurses and other patient care staff working in general practice in South West Wiltshire
- Welcoming new figures showing that 13,260 apprenticeships have been created in South West Wiltshire since 2010

## I also

- wrote to the Economic Secretary to the Treasury asking for detail on how local entrepreneurs will benefit from new reforms designed to unlock finance for SMEs
- travelled to Brunei and Nepal to visit Gurkha soldiers, families and veterans and meet with ministerial opposite numbers
- met Ukrainian soldiers training on Salisbury Plain

# March

Alongside business as usual, March 2023 was an important anniversary. It was 20 years since the Iraq War, in which I served as a navy doctor, began. Whilst marking the anniversary of one war, I also initiated a new campaign against incinerators, although this one was waged with letters to ministers.

## Constituency highlights

- Advancing my crusade against incinerators with the first of many letters to ministers calling for a moratorium on the construction of new facilities and an incinerator tax similar to that on landfill
- Requesting a meeting with Wiltshire Police Chief Constable Catherine Roper to discuss the finding of the damning Casey review on the Met
- Speaking up for Westbury against the attempts of Bath's elected representatives to send more heavy traffic through Wiltshire
- Calling for a north-south connection route on the A350 to add weight to the campaign for a Westbury bypass
- Reveal of Trowbridge Town Hall revamp secured by the Future High Street Fund

## I also

- took part in BBC Question Time to discuss a range of issues with panellists and audience members
- represented the government in a House of Commons debate on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Operation Telic



*'Whatever one's views of the wisdom and judgment of those who preceded us, it is unarguable that our brave men and women stepped up to the plate as only soldiers, sailors and aviators can.'*  
-during a House of Commons debate on the anniversary

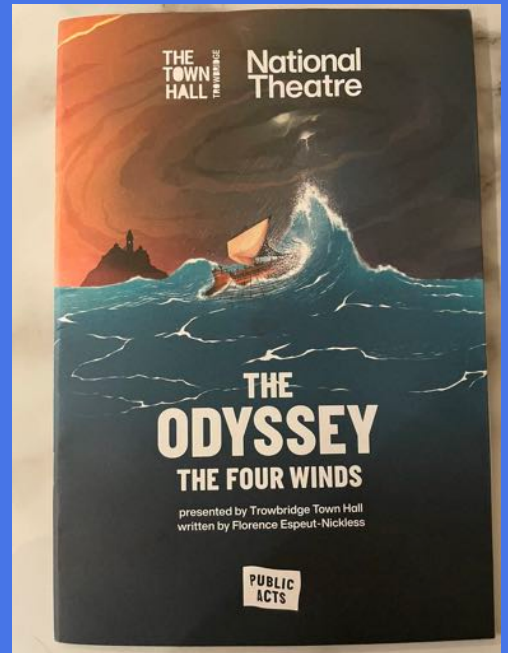
Serving near Basra, Iraq, 2003, having been called up as a Battle Group Medical Officer - despite opposing the war in Parliament!



Talking politics on BBC Question Time



With veterans and staff at Alabaré in Salisbury discussing work to transform the lives of ex-service people



My programme from *The Odyssey: The Four Winds*, a great performance at the town hall before its temporary closure for revamp



Therapy dogs. Meeting some four-legged friends from Dogs for Health at my Trowbridge office.

Outside Parade House after a Trowbridge Place Partnership meeting





# April

The early days of spring were a period of much optimism this year with lots of promising plans being developed for Wiltshire, especially the county town. Beyond the constituency, the union's prospects also seemed stronger than ever with the separatist SNP heading into total meltdown after the arrest of their treasurer. All in all, I couldn't help but think United Kingdom's, and Wiltshire's, best days lie ahead.

## Constituency highlights:

- Plenty of visits from village halls to pubs to discuss issues with constituents
- Writing to Kate Mavor, Chief Executive of English Heritage, to demand Westbury's iconic white horse is given a long overdue makeover
- Planning consent received for plans to refurbish Trowbridge town hall
- Hosting another Trowbridge Place Partnership including a tour of vacant units which are soon to be filled
- Seeing a production of *The Odyssey* produced by Trowbridge Town Hall and the National Theatre in partnership
- Writing to both the Environment and Energy Ministers asking about changes in planning of the Westbury incinerator to use less green technology

## I also

- visited the charity Alabaré which provides support for homeless veterans
- welcomed measures from government to strengthen regulation and prevent the pollution of rivers
- defended the government's proud record on supporting Ukraine at the despatch box in the House of Commons

# May

The coronation of King Charles III made this a truly historic month. His Majesty has big shoes to fill but has made a great start.

Constituency highlights:

- Meeting with Chief Constable Catherine Roper to discuss policing priorities and lessons from the Casey review
- More letters to senior ministers on the technology to be used in the Westbury incinerator
- Meeting with colleagues who face incinerators in their constituencies to coordinate our plans to lobby government for a change in policy
- Going litter picking at my adopted lay-by on the A350
- Visiting Apetito in Trowbridge again to discuss closed-loop plastic recycling which it is a leader on. Lobbying ministers for a more helpful approach.
- Supported Trowbridge residents in the local council tax poll
- Wiltshire Council announcing plans for a new leisure centre in Trowbridge. Hurrah!
- Meeting with Nick Pahl, CEO Society of Occupational Medicine to discuss ideas for expanding access to occupational health

I also

- laid a wreath on behalf of the government with Czech President Petr Pavel at Brookwood Cemetery
- visited British military personnel in Estonia
- traveled to Ukraine to better understand rehabilitation of military casualties and how the UK can help
- attended a reception in Parliament on improving diabetes care



Z/Yen's research shows the innovation and dynamism at the heart of the economy, which I have been promoting with my TechTrowbridge campaign

*'Rishi has often spoken about turning the UK into a tech superpower. But it's not just about London. Wiltshire's county town has been recognised by the National Endowment for Science Technolgy and the Arts as a nationally significant tech cluster. Silicon Valley here in the shires? Absolutely!'*



At a Guide Dogs event supporting guide dog owners' access to shops, restaurants and other businesses



Above: Talking with British soldiers in Estonia



Left: Speaking to the press at National Armed Forces Day in Falmouth



Litter picking by the A350



Laying a wreath at Brookwood Cemetery

# June

With an abortive coup in Russia by the notorious Wagner Group, June was a dramatic month on the world stage. Britain continued to show international leadership during times of chaos, hosting the Ukrainian Recovery Conference in London. Meanwhile, I carried on with constituency work and some long term projects at the MOD.

Constituency highlights:

- Meeting councillors to discuss cleaning up a local eyesore
- Opposing Bath & North East Somerset Council's cuts to bus services which are jointly funded with Wiltshire Council
- Writing to senior ministers including Michael Gove pressing the case for an incinerator moratorium
- Blasting the greenwashing of incinerators in a *Daily Mail* article
- Working with local councillors to discuss heavy goods vehicles damaging old roads in Maiden Bradley, Corsley and Chapmanslade
- Meeting with Business West to discuss the Local Skills Improvement Plan
- Meeting Glass Pharms to learn about the cultivation and processing of medicinal cannabis
- Attending consultation on proposals to amend the Bath clean air zone, which would shunt heavy traffic into Wiltshire

I also

- supported the widening of the Home Office disregard and pardon scheme to redress the criminalisation of LGBT service people
- spoke at a reception to mark the completion of LGBT Veterans' Review
- marked Armed Forces Day at Falmouth
- welcomed Rishi Sunak's achievement of the Atlantic Declaration, strengthening trade with the US in key areas
- welcomed new research from Z/Yen, a leading City think tank, published its latest Smart Centres Index which ranked London top among the work's high tech cities
- gave supported for Open Doors for all guide dog owners

# July

Though no-one tried to overthrow a European government, July had its fair share of dramatic events. Nigel Farage was debanked in what turned out to be a politically motivated act of discrimination. That's truly shocking whatever you think of the victim. Banking isn't what it was. In more encouraging news, we joined the CPTPP which will be a huge boon to our economy in the long-term. My work on righting past wrongs for LGBT veterans stepped up a notch whilst I ploughed on with my campaign against incinerators, all making for a pretty busy time even as Parliament broke for summer.

## Constituency highlights:

- Writing to the Energy Minister calling for the implementation of the 'polluter pays' principle in the incinerator industry
- Meeting with both Rebecca Pow and Thérèse Coffey from Defra to press my case against incinerators
- Participating in the train ticket office consultation. Train operators subsequently U-turned
- A firm annual fixture - Fovant Badges Society Drumhead Service
- Meeting again with Chief Constable Catherine Roper
- Writing to the Health Secretary to support Wiltshire health professionals' covid backlog bonus claim

## I also

- responded to Lord Atherton's report on the gross pre-2000 mistreatment of LGBT people in the Armed Forces and apologised for wrong doings, as did the Prime Minister and Defence Secretary. Spoke to LGBT veterans before the London Pride march



Joining England Heritage at Bratton Camp to see the result of the landmark's much-needed restoration

The horse was likely carved to commemorate the defining 878 Battle of Ethandun in nearby Edington. This is the one in which Alfred defeated the Danes. Thus my constituency can properly be said to have witnessed the dawn of what we know as England. A proud boast.



*'What happened left a stain on defence. It was plain wrong, even by the standard of the day. I offer my sincere regrets as Minister for Defence People, and I apologise.'*

Meeting veterans at the pre-release of the Etherton report

The launch of Lord Etherton's report into the shocking way LGBT sailors, soldiers and aviators were handled between 1967-2000. It's been a privilege to be the defence minister taking forward its recommendations. Thank you to all members of the community for their patience and dignity.



Site visit with residents at Slag Lane



# August

With Parliament in recess and many taking a summer break, August is usually the quietest month in British politics. Nevertheless, ministerial work goes on and constituents' concerns continue to need careful attention. This year I received a particularly large amount of correspondence on illegal immigration. People are either concerned that we are hosting asylum seekers in the lap of luxury or that they are being imprisoned in nasty, insanitary accommodation. The reality is not luxurious or inhumane, just basic. As we head into the new year, I continue to support solutions for stopping the boats and the criminal gangs behind them.

Constituency highlights:

- Westbury's iconic white horse being restored to its full glory after years of being the grey mare
- Joining Hilperton and Trowbridge residents in opposing a second McDonald's in Trowbridge
- Visiting Slag Lane Westbury to understand local infrastructure issues

I also

- visited Ukraine for a second time as a Defence Minister and visited the liberated town of Bucha and Irpin
- gave an interview to *The Financial Times* to discuss recruitment into the Armed Forces
- pressed for more older and neurodivergent people in the military

# September

Back to school month. Parliament reconvenes briefly before conference season. Its an opportunity for grandstanding. However, we also saw some good stuff, for example the Prime Minister's pivot toward a more equitable and sustainable path toward net zero. My constituents in more remote areas without gas will welcome that. We also heard that Birmingham council went bankrupt. Closer to home, I have been warning of the debt run up by Trowbridge town council which concerns me greatly.

Constituency highlights:

- Access to Finance, a TechTrowbridge event at Elevate Online Marketing helping small businesses understand what funding options are available to them
- Wiltshire College announces its TechTrowbridge esports venue
- Visiting Hindon surgery to discuss the replacement of the current cramped arrangement
- Visiting Wardour Catholic Primary School
- F&S Gibbs Transport Services Ltd in Warminster received over £150,000 in match funding from the Department for Transport, which will go to enhancing roadside facilities for lorry drivers; great to pay them a visit
- Visiting Novuna Vehicle Solutions to get briefed on the latest in electric vehicles
- Meeting with Warminster councillors to discuss the protection of greenfield sites

I also

- attended the Invictus Games for recovering veterans in Düsseldorf
- spoke at the Defence Perinatal Festival in Warminster as part of MOD efforts to make defence careers even more attractive to women
- welcomed revised ONS figures showing the UK's post-pandemic recovery was much stronger than previously thought





Talking to Team UK at the Invictus Games



Visiting F&S Gibbs Transport Services Ltd to see the site their award money will be spent on



One of my woolly friends, Back British Farming Day



Speaking at the LGBTQ+ Defence Awards, celebrating courage in a year of change



Talking TechTrowbridge with local entrepreneurs at Access to Finance. Huge thanks to the Federation of Small Bussinesses and the University of the West of England for organising and Elevate Online Marketing for hosting.

Sharing a cuppa with volunteers at the SSAFA Big Brew Up



# October

Conference season came and went, bringing the normal noise, a few serious announcements, and a man throwing glitter over Sir Keir Starmer. But October 2023 will forever be remembered for the horrific events in Israel, the worst pogrom against Jews since the Holocaust. Hamas's awful terrorist attack also unleashed serious upheaval in the UK with a big spike in anti-Semitic incidents. Despite those who exploit our openness in order to spread hate, I am truly grateful to be living in a country which champions tolerance and pluralism.

Constituency highlights:

- Chairing another meeting of the Trowbridge Place Partnership
- Attending an early remembrance event, the Festival of Remembrance in Trowbridge at which the Warminster Military Wives Choir performed
- Meeting with Mark Marshall, the founder of Trowbridge Service Users Group which promotes self help and support for people who use or have used mental health services
- Writing to Wiltshire's Chief Constable regarding the policing of anti-Semitism
- Writing to ministers to highlight new evidence of the harmful health effects of incinerators
- Lobbying ministers about the Department for Transport north-south strategic study that will impact on our hopes for a Westbury bypass

I also

- welcomed Rishi Sunak's announcement that tobacco will not be sold to 14 year old and under on a rolling basis, ultimately saving thousands of lives
- joined volunteers from SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity, at the Big Brew Up fundraiser
- spoke at the LGBTQ+ in Defence Awards
- introduced new support for female veterans

# November

Whilst Israel's campaign against Hamas continued to preoccupy the headlines for most of November, there was no shortage of domestic drama. David Cameron made a surprise return to government and the courts once again held up the Prime Minister's plan to deal with illegal immigration. But for me, one thing above all stood out - the news that inflation had halved, undoubtedly the best and most important thing for my constituents. Amidst the politics, we took time out to mark Remembrance. We will remember them.

Constituency highlights:

- Speaking at the Trowbridge Chamber of Commerce/Wiltshire Police briefing for small business on preventing cyber crime in the Civic
- An update from NHSBSWICB, the NHS branch for the South West, on care provision with a much welcome emphasis on home care
- Planting a poppy in the South West Wiltshire patch of the House of Commons Garden of Remembrance
- Visiting constituents near Stourhead to discuss a controversial proposed plantation with CPRE
- Visiting Warminster school
- Meeting with Warminster Town Mayor to discuss local issues including Number 3 High Street
- Visiting Lumiar School on Stowford Manor Farm
- Visiting Longleat and hearing plans from Nick Blofield, Chief Operating Officer
- Committing to tackle the long-neglected problems of malnutrition through preventive measures which could save the NHS £22.6 billion every year

I also

- inspected Gurkhas passing out parade at Catterick
- marked Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall Festival of Remembrance, in Trowbridge and Warminster
- represented Defence at a Dawali event in Portsmouth
- spoke at the Women in Defence awards in the Guild Hall



Selling poppies at King's Cross, raising money for the Royal British Legion



'Weight watchers' for HGVs in Maiden Bradley, Corsley, Chapmanslade and the Deverills



Inspecting Gurkhas passing out parade in Yorkshire



Speaking at the Women in Defence Awards



Another ministerial visit to British forces in Estonia



Left: Planting my Royal British Legion poppy at the Garden of Remembrance at the House of Commons

Right: Warminster - nice high street minus the mess in the middle. Residents and businesses shouldn't be entering yet another year with No. 3 blotting our townscape. Enough!



# December

There's always a lot to do in December to prepare for the winter break. Before putting my festive hat on there is still much work to be done. Here's what I've been up to so far.

Constituency highlights:

- Meeting with Wiltshire College Principal Iain Hatt
- Another site visit to Slag Lane
- Attending a meeting of the 3 Villages/Maiden Bradley weight watchers to discuss heavy good vehicles in small villages
- Working with Wiltshire Council and stakeholders to tackle the dilapidated site on Warminster high street
- The Hilperton McDonald's is refused planning permission.  
Result!
- Lobbying ministers for a Westbury bypass in the upcoming M4-South Coast connectivity study
- Tackling Lloyds Bank on the planned closure of its Warminster branch

I also

- visited British forces in Estonia



Merry Christmas Wiltshire