Dear Julian,

NEW UK COUNTER-UNMANNED AIRCRAFT STRATEGY

Through the Defence Committee’s ongoing inquiry into the domestic threat of drones, you will no doubt be aware that in recent years unmanned aircraft including ‘drones’ have evolved rapidly in capability and availability. The development of drone technology presents significant opportunities, and in coming years drones have the potential to revolutionise logistics and even personal transport.

But drones can be misused. Flown recklessly or negligently they can pose a risk to public safety, such as happened at Gatwick airport over the 2018 Christmas period. Drones can also be used deliberately to facilitate or commit crime.

The Government has been working for some time to reduce the risks associated with illegal drone use. Since the Gatwick incident, we have made significant progress in our ability to respond to illegal drone activity. But given the challenge posed by rapid advances in drone technology, and the threat it has the potential to pose, we have needed a way to provide overarching direction to our efforts.

I am therefore pleased to announce that yesterday, I laid copies of the UK’s new Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Strategy in the House Library.

The Strategy focuses on mitigating the highest-harm domestic risks resulting from malicious use of aerial drones. These include:

- Facilitating terrorist attacks;
- Facilitating crime, especially in our prisons;
- Disrupting critical national infrastructure (CNI);
- Potential use by hostile state actors.

The Strategy is forward-looking, flexible and will evolve along with the underlying technology to keep ahead of the threat. It will complement existing and planned legislation which will let us tap into the benefits of this technology while helping keep people safe both in the air and on the ground. It encompasses the roles of both government and industry. It sits alongside CONTEST, the UK’s Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and the UK’s Serious and Organised Crime Strategy. It offers a single vision to ensure coherence, efficiency and value for money. It will also promote UK prosperity and inward investment, showing our intent to create a safe and collaborative environment for the incorporation of drones into business and society, as well as for the UK becoming a world leader in counter-drone technology.

Success over the next three years will see us reduce the risk posed by the highest-harm use of drones while also maximising the benefits of drone technology to our society and economy. We will achieve this by:

1. Developing a comprehensive understanding of the evolving risks posed by the malicious and illegal use of drones;
2. Taking a ‘full spectrum’ approach to deter, detect and disrupt drone misuse;
3. Building strong relationships with industry to ensure their products meet the highest security standards; and
4. Empowering the police and other operational responders through access to counter-drone capabilities and effective legislation, training and guidance.

The Strategy is only concerned with countering the malicious, illegal use of aerial drones. A forthcoming Aviation Strategy will set out the Government’s strategy for the safe use of emerging aviation technology, including legal drone use.

I am copying this letter to the other members of the Defence Committee.
Yours Sincerely,

Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP

Minister of State for Security and
Deputy for EU Exit and No Deal Preparation