***Question 1:*** Why is it safe for some people to make deliveries but not others? If there is no contact, the risk of transmission is through the object delivered, which remains the same no matter who does it?

***My response:*** I understand that Covid-19 has meant a reduction in delivery services although distribution of mail by post, delivery of parcels and online shopping and home delivery of newspapers continues.  I think there is a balance to be struct here.  For those business who are still trading, advertising with households who may not have access to online services helps them communication their services.  It is a challenging time for people and for businesses but any responsible company that distributes door to door advertising must have implemented measures to ensure the safety of their staff and the public, such as social distancing and appropriate PPE and ensure that the latest safety information from government is followed.  Fundamentally it is about reducing possibility of transmission and contact to reduce the spread of Covid-19.    Where the Government has permitted the continued service of some deliveries, they must adhere to a strict regulatory framework to continue delivering in the safest possible manner.

I understand that restrictions on delivering election literature is also under discussion by political parties and their local associations. As election leafleting is a voluntary action, there can be no company accountable for the health and safety of those leafleting. Local party associations are able to deliver election literature through delivery companies. This has two clear benefits: firstly, that delivery companies are able to ensure a high standard of safety for their employees due to Government regulation in this area; and, that delivery companies can often use fewer people to deliver leaflets than local party associations, therefore ensuring that we can reduce the number of transmission pathways.

***Question 2:*** From Andrew Burrows – I have emailed Andrew separately.

***Question 3:*** Seeing that the Nightingale Hospital is in your constituency of Meriden, do you think it was a good investment of taxpayers’ money seeing as it has never been used even though military personnel were trained and essential equipment was diverted there, or could all those resources have been better used within public health care services? Do you think the government has failed in its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic?

***My reply:*** I believe the Nightingale hospitals were absolutely the right investment to make at the right time. A key consideration of the UK’s strategy against Covid-19 was to ensure that the NHS had enough capacity in the event of large spikes in the number of hospitalisations. The Nightingale hospitals helped to secure this part of the national strategy. I would dread to think of what would have happened in the event of such a large spike without the hospital bed capacity for all patients.

Lastly, I think it is important to note that the attitude from Her Majesty’s Treasury throughout this pandemic has been generous and has provided government departments with the funding necessary to carry out their role in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the conversation of diverting funds away from precautionary measures is not a pressing issue for now; although, I am confident that there will be many reports after the pandemic has concluded. To say a little more detail on this, the Chancellor reaffirmed the Government’s multi-year commitment to the NHS by stating in his Spending Review that the core health budget will grow by £6.6 billion, there will be 50,000 more nurses in our NHS, we will see 50 million more GP appointments, an increase of capital investment in the NHS by £2.2 billion, 40 new hospitals and 70 more upgraded. I am confident that the Government knows where within the NHS funds need to go; and will continue to make the right decision with regards to resource allocation.

***Question 4:*** What can the government do more to promote contact tracing including more promotion of the NHS COVID-19 app when we start to open up once again? I believe that testing and contact tracing is as vital as the vaccine at the moment and I think people need reminding from the top of Government.

***My response:*** You are right to say that contact tracing is an essential component in our fight against Covid-19. After the hardship faced throughout the country, I was to learn that the NHS Test and Trace app was launched across England and Wales in September. I am confident, as it was the case when previous areas came out of higher tiers, that Government guidance will once again require venues in certain sectors to use track and trace QR codes in order to record contact details of customers, visitors and staff to help break the transmission chains of Covid-19.

In my experience of venues and the app, businesses were extremely responsible, and I was always pointed to a QR code for me to scan before I was permitted access to the premises. This is, of course, the right approach. When lockdown restrictions begin to ease and life starts to make a slow return to normality, I have full confidence that the track and trace app will be heavily encouraged by the Government as a prime mechanism in preventing outbreaks of the virus or any new variants. I will also be doing my own work to ensure that businesses and customers will be making full use of the app.

In terms of what more the Government can do to promote this, I would suggest that greater distribution of track and trace guidance and by clear and decisive messaging on this front. I know that Minister knows the real value of the track and trace app and will be strongly encouraging, advising and promoting its use within society.

***Question 5 & 6:*** What is the government’s plan for the 3rd sector? We have carried our communities and kept them safe and well, yet our volunteers who are out there and are possibly more exposed haven't been given any idea on how to access the vaccine so they can continue to serve their community but stay safe and keep everyone else safe. The Charity/Community Sector seems to have been forgotten a little throughout the whole situation.

***My response:*** As you write, the third sector has and continues to play a tremendous role within our communities throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the people committing themselves to the work of charities during this time are some of the most courageous and selfless people I have ever met.

I was pleased to see the Chancellor announce £750 million of support specifically for charities in April last year. This was a huge and unprecedented package of support and I was extremely pleased to see such dedication to those who serve in third sector organisations. Many charities are also able to take advantage of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

It is also welcome news that Government departments will directly allocate £360 million to charities providing key services during the crisis – including up to £200 million for hospices – while £370 million will support small and medium-sized charities – including through a grant to the National Lottery Community Fund

The Government has also pledged to match whatever the public decides to donate to the BBC Big Night In fundraising campaign with the same amount to further support charities. £20m of this match-funding will go to the National Emergencies Trust appeal, and the rest will be split between Comic Relief and Children in Need

As the pandemic draws to a close in the coming months, I am confident that the vital third sector will not be overlooked in how it can be supported in the national recovery, as it has already committed itself to essential work during the past 12 months.