Template Letter to MPs

[Your full address]

[Your postcode]

[Date]

Dear [your MP/or recipient]

My name is [YOUR NAME] and I am a constituent of [YOUR CONSTITUENCY].

I am writing to express my concern at the news that The Observatory Science Centre (OSC) at Herstmonceux has been given notice by its landlords (Queen’s University, Ontario, Canada) that their lease will not be renewed in 2026.

The OSC is run by Science Projects, a charitable educational trust. As the current leaseholders, the OSC provides valuable science and outreach education to schools and the community within Sussex and the surrounding region. Its hands-on interactive science exhibits and educational programs attract over 60,000 visitors a year.

For 30 years, the OSC has also proved itself a good custodian of the site’s Grade II\* listed observatory buildings, domes and instruments. The site is the former home of the Royal Greenwich Observatory (RGO), and still houses most of the RGO’s remaining historic telescopes. Since securing a National Lottery grant at taking on the lease, the OSC has restored the domes and telescopes to working order, and maintained the observatory and the telescopes for public access.

Three of the telescopes, including the seventh largest working refracting telescope in the world, are used on public viewing evenings and continue to inspire a passion for astronomy and science in a new generation. The observatory site and telescopes are directly linked to (a) the discovery of the first Black Hole, (b) Sir Patrick Moore’s mapping of the moon, and (c) the proof of Einstein's general theory of relativity.

Queen’s University, Canada, which owns the entire estate, including the Grade I listed Herstmonceux Castle, has yet to reveal its plans for the site. However, it is clear the university faces financial difficulties, compounded by the discovery, in 2023, that Herstmonceux Castle, which they run as Bader College, has major structural issues. The students were sent home and the castle has since been closed to the public.

Queen’s University made the following public announcement about its decision not to renew the OSC’s lease in August.

We will soon be embarking on a full operational and strategic review concerning the future orientation and sustainability of the college, the buildings, and the Herstmonceux property on which they are located. Signing any long-term leases in advance of that effort would be imprudent and premature.

I am especially concerned that the apparent reluctance of Queen’s University to provide any further information on their plans since August, or to enter into any negotiation or conversation regarding its subsequent operation, risks the site’s closure when the lease expires in 2026.

There is considerable local support for the OSC to continue to run the observatory site, with more than 11,000 people now having signed the petition to Queen’s University to extend the OSC lease.

I therefore request your help in drawing the situation to the attention of relevant governmental and local authorities with a view to opening a dialogue with Queen’s University.

The purpose of such dialogue would be to:

Help secure an extension to the OSC’s lease, as the proven trustworthy custodian of the site.

Ensure the site retains its role as an important STEM centre and science education resource.

Ensure the historic buildings and telescopes of this heritage site remain open to the public and available for their use.

Ensure the site retains its charitable status, with any income from it invested in keeping with the OSC’s longstanding commitment to science education and the benefit of the local community.

In your response please let me know how you intend to address this on my behalf. If you’re unable to address this personally, I would like to request that you escalate my letter to the relevant Minister or department.

Please do keep me informed of any progress made.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

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