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Thursday 28th April 2016

Hello again,

As always there's a plethora of issues arising daily both in Westminster and the constituency.

All a Buzz

Amongst the highlights was a visit to the teaching apiary at Heatherton Grange, a centre for excellence in bee keeping. Invaluable work is being carried out here and I've since raised the issue of the importance of continuing adequate funding for our regional bee inspectors with the Environment Minister.



Rugby Rebecca

Who wouldn't enjoy an outing to meet our top rugby team – Taunton Titans? I was delighted to join a crowd of hundreds at the last home game (they won I'm pleased to say.) The rugby club is one of many fine sporting facilities in the constituency.

Rebecca getting to grips with rail

Another success was the tremendous turn out (almost 200 people) for the open meeting I called to gauge support for a potential rail station in Wellington. With overwhelming support for the idea I'm now pressing all parties to put in their share of the funding needed to carry out the engineering and timetabling study which is necessary to progress. I'm meeting with Rail Minister Claire Perry to discuss the next steps soon. It will be a challenging project and may take time but one thing is for certain, nothing will happen if we don't try!



Road Report

In total this government is investing £23.2 billion in infrastructure in the South West. The A358 upgrade was singled out again recently by the Chancellor in response to my Treasury question relating to productivity in Taunton Deane. Improving the link between the A303 and the M5 is a crucial part of the plan to raise productivity not just locally but in the wider South West. Getting goods and people in and out more quickly along this 'Super Highway' will be a big benefit to business. This was George Osbornes' response:

'..Taunton, and indeed the whole of the South-West is a great place to do business. We are now investing huge sums in the roads and railways, broadband and housing. Of course without her (Rebecca) I do not think we would be having the A358 upgrade. There is a general lesson, which is that when the south-west votes blue, the voice of the South-West is heard in Parliament.'

Highways England have been explaining the road upgrade process to local people and traffic surveys are underway. I attended a useful presentation on the road plans at the excellent Neroche Annual Parish meeting recently. I urge everyone to have their say as the development must work for local people and it must blend in with the environment. I was pleased the Highways England delegation openly stressed the importance of the environment with a special mention of the significance of ancient woodland and trees on the proposed route. This was fortunate as it was the subject of my PMQ last week in which I suggested this habitat received the same recognition as listed monuments and heritage sites.

Read what I said [HERE](#)



Better Broadband

This continues to be raised by people in blackspots across the constituency and I am doing my best to highlight these to BT and CDS and I continue to press Minister Ed Vaisey over concerns.

The Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) programme remains on track to meet its own targets by the end of 2016. However, the state aid notification from the EU has been pushed back to June which is delaying the start of phase 2 of the rollout. So as to be ready when this is achieved the CDS Open Market Review public consultation has opened and runs for 30 days to help those considering tendering for the contracts.

In the meantime anyone within the CDS area that currently has a broadband speed of less than 2 Mbps can qualify for a voucher for £500 to go towards the installation cost of a new broadband connection. Residents and businesses can choose their supplier from an approved list which includes satellite, wireless and fibre providers; and each solution will guarantee at least 10 Mbps download speed.

For more on the Voucher Scheme, click [HERE](#).

On an optimistic note, I'm delighted that CDS has been awarded an extra £4m from the Chancellor to deliver ultrafast broadband speeds of up a minimum of 100 Mbps as part of phase 2 of the rollout.

About Academies

This government is committed to ensuring an excellent education for all and is raising standards across the board. We can give our children no better start. Whilst I've worked hard with others to achieve success in terms of a fairer funding deal being calculated for our historically underfunded Somerset schools, the academisation programme, included in the current White Paper has sparked some debate. I'm passing on concerns to Education Minister, Nicky Morgan and the consultation process is underway. It's especially important that our small, rural schools can continue to operate successfully.

EU and Environment

The Environment Audit Select Committee of which I am a member, has just launched its report on the inquiry into EU Environmental legislation. It concluded that EU membership has been crucial in shaping UK environmental policy and that such things as air and water policy, clean beaches and biodiversity are inextricably linked to our place in the EU.

Read the report [HERE](#).

EU Debate

I am holding my first Environment Forum event on 13th May at 6:30pm. The topic for this is the EU and I'm delighted that

international conservationist and dad of Boris, Stanley Johnson, will be our guest speaker. Only a few places left! Contact my office for more details and to reserve a place on 020 7219 4831 or rebecca.pow.mp@parliament.uk

I'm also chairing a debate on the upcoming referendum: 'The EU: In or Out?' on June 13th 2016 at the Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton. Again, if you would like to attend this event then please contact my office on 01823 443062 or email sharon.grant@parliament.uk / livvi.grant@parliament.uk

Rebecca's Roundup

Here are just some of the other areas I have been involved with recently:

Westminster Hall Dairy Debate - with fresh milk prices to farmers down 25 – 50% since 2014 many farmers are being paid less than the cost of production and we continue to see dairy farmers go out of business by the day. I urged the Rory Stewart, the Minister, to do everything possible to aid the sector.

Read what was said [HERE](#).

Contaminated Blood Debate – I continue to press government to improve the lives of those who through no fault of their own have been blighted by received contaminated blood.

- EFFRA Select Committee inquiry into flooding
- Environment Audit Select Committee inquiry into soil
- Animal Welfare All Party Group – chaired presentation on Law commission review of all animal/countryside legislation

Meeting with;

- Healthwatch Somerset for the launch of their new codes for care homes;
- addressed residents of Blagdon Hill Retirement Home,
- spoke to Francis Clark Business group
- met with local farmers forum
- attended the lively Taunton Vale Hockey Club Awards Dinner;

If you missed me on BBC Sun Politics Show, you can view it [HERE](#).

And read my article for the Guardian [HERE](#).

As always please contact my office if you require any assistance on 01823 443062.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Rebecca

Ps: Calling all budding photographers. Do enter your best pictures of Somerset in my Somerset Day Art & Photography Competition. View the details [HERE](#).