



E-Bulletin – Friday 20th October 2017

Hello again,

As I write, a raft of policy announcements have come forward to ensure the successful running of domestic matters at home whilst at the same time we edge on with legislation and discussions bringing us closer to exiting the European Union. Essential to leaving the EU will be a Customs Bill, legislating for the UK's future customs, VAT and Excise Regimes, and Post-Brexit Trade and Customs Policy. Consultation is key and white papers have been launched on these issues. It is essential that businesses take part in the consultation, and if any want to raise particular points please get in touch, I am always listening and feeding in to Ministers.

In this way I continue my work in Westminster representing all aspects of life in Taunton Deane.

Recent Announcements

All the work lobbying for fairer funding for our school pupils has paid off and I am pleased that finally the historic injustice, whereby pupils in Somerset received on average £2000 less than pupils in the best funded areas, has been rectified. This will help schools to manage their budgets, although I fully understand the demands they face and continue to speak up for them to Education Ministers.

Still on education, I am pleased that Government has announced a major review of university funding and student financing - on top of the freezing of maximum fee rates and increasing the amount graduates can earn before they start repaying their fees to £25,000. I have been speaking to Ministers to ensure the needs of our students are understood so that we do not over burden them with debt but we also need to ensure that those who don't pursue a university course are not unfairly penalised by contributing towards the training of those that do go. A full review of this is taking place.

Housing is always controversial and whilst Taunton Deane is taking its fair share of proposed new homes, the stark reality nationally is that there is still not enough new housing being built. So I welcome the government's recent announcements of an extra £2billion for the affordable housing budget – and allowing homes to be built for social rent. This builds on a £10 billion extension to Help to Buy schemes and new protections for people renting from a private landlord.

The successful allocation of a further £375,000 towards the Garden Town in Taunton is also welcome and will be channelled into master planning for the new status. It is essential that the right infrastructure, green spaces, cycle ways and facilities are put in place if increased housing is to work effectively and the Garden Town project should help facilitate this.

Clean Growth Strategy

I attended the launch of the government's Clean Growth Strategy – an ambitious strategy to cut emissions to help us reach our climate change targets, reduce energy bills, support new low carbon and renewable energy technologies and create jobs. It's good for the environment and good for business and covers all sectors including housing and transport. Low carbon innovation is at the heart of the strategy with over £2.5bn invested from 2015 – 2021. This forms part of the largest increase in public spending on UK science, research and innovation in almost 40 years.

New Posts

Since last writing I have been elected onto the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and find myself immersed in areas as diverse as the Sky/Fox merger, abuse in ladies football and fake news.

I have also been moved from being the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Housing Minister in the Department of Communities and Local Government to being a PPS in the Department for Environment, Food, Farming and Rural Affairs. This is a key department in the Brexit negotiations as we bring forward a Fisheries Bill and an Agricultural Bill. With Secretary of State Michael Gove heading up the team, together with Environment Minister Therese Coffey and Farm Minister George Eustace we have a strong voice and I'm delighted to be part of it.

As many of you will know this is an area dear to my heart and at this historic time when we are re-forming our approach to land use and supports it is a fascinating time to be involved. I continue to work with all the environmental and farming organisations locally and nationally to represent their views in these areas.



Listen to my speech [HERE](#).

I was honoured to be invited to be given a platform to talk about my environmental work locally and in Westminster, on the main stage at the party Conference just before the PM spoke. I've been involved in many areas that are starting to have some really positive outcomes thanks to this government listening and taking action:

Tougher sentences are being introduced for cases of animal cruelty. This was a recommendation from the DEFRA Select Committee animal welfare inquiry I was involved with. Now, heinous abuse exacted on animals could attract a 5 year sentence as opposed to the puny 6 months sentences currently available. This brings us in line with many other countries. It's also significant because those who abuse animals often go on to abuse their fellow humans, so this needs to be taken much more seriously.

Whilst we aren't fortunate enough to have any elephants roaming around the Blackdowns or the Quantocks, the proposals to introduce a total ban on UK sales of ivory to help end the horrific poaching of elephants, which is putting one of the world's most iconic species at risk of extinction, has huge support from locals. Working with groups calling for this action I've spoken on this issue many times in Parliament. The measures, by the way, will not affect the right to own, gift, inherit or bequeath items containing ivory.

With the protection of ancient woodland and trees and soils being given more attention together with plastic recycling and a ban on plastic micro beads in cosmetics and care products coming in there is plenty of good environmental policy on the cards and I'd proud to be part of it. That's not to say there isn't more to do.

I've recently launched a publication in conjunction with the Conservative Environment Network calling for a more holistic approach, across departments, to environmental policy and I'm pleased to say it has been well received and has certainly got people talking. I'm following this with a focused event on soil in Parliament shortly in conjunction with the Sustainable Soil alliance. (Never before have had earth worms and nematodes had a voice in Parliament!)



Out in our local Countryside

Whatever the challenges of politics both locally and in Westminster, one of the best ways of refreshing the batteries is to get out into our stunning countryside. With the Blackdown Hills on our doorstep we are spoilt and there are a wealth of walks, both short and long to be enjoyed. Armed with the excellent AONB footpath brochure I picked up, my husband and I recently enjoyed walking the circuit radiating around Otterford church and Otterford Lakes. It was a glorious uplifting and peaceful foray and only a stones throw from Taunton. I highly recommend it for a whole range of reasons.



I have been raising the power of nature and the use that can be made of the great outdoors across departments in Parliament, calling on Jeremy Hunt in the Health Department to encourage GP's to harness green prescriptions in their armoury of treatments for mental health issues (they are commonly used in New Zealand with good effect) and calling for more activities such as gardening to be worked into programmes for the unemployed. I've also spoken to the Justice Department about projects for those on remand. Not only is the engagement with nature and the physical exercise beneficial, useful skills can also be learned which can be helpful in getting people back into the working world.

These is good evidence to support these examples. The Somerset Wildlife Trust has run a successful partnership in association with Taunton Association for the Homeless bringing together people experiencing homelessness and isolation to work on a community wildlife garden in Taunton. It has enabled them to connect with wildlife, get advice, socialise and generally add to their well-being. Both the National Gardens Scheme organisation and the charity MIND have reported on similar outcomes and both advocate the benefits of this kind of eco-therapy.

Older Generations Fair

On a related note my second Older Generations Fair was, I am delighted to say, a great success. With the theme of health and wellbeing the idea was to raise awareness of the plethora of activities, hobbies, services, volunteering opportunities and much more besides which are available across Taunton Deane

as we get older. The fitter we can remain the better for us individually but also for our hard pressed medical services especially in areas like Somerset where we have a predominantly elderly population. Men in Sheds and the Rivertones went down a storm!



Rebecca and 'the' Road



Rebecca discussing A358 with Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling

The A358 upgrade has been all engrossing as we have progressed through the initial consultation with all the issues this has highlighted. I have worked hard at Government level to make the case for a second consultation phase for the route between Thornfalcon and Junction 25 on the M5 as the one proposal put forward by Highways England in the initial consultation seemed highly inappropriate.

I am pleased that Highways England have listened and a second consultation is being offered. It is essential that this road upgrade delivers for local people and Taunton itself whilst at the same time achieving the national aims as a strategic route that will speed up traffic flow from east to west linking to the M5. I have pressed for connectivity to the Nexus employment site, the motorway junction and Taunton itself to be taken into account as well as the need to protect our precious habitats and best farmland.

Wellington Monument News

Despite much good work by many local people including our Monument Champions, the National Trust bid for crucial funds to enable the full restoration programme for the

Wellington Monument, was turned down by the Heritage Lottery Fund for the second time. I'm working with the Trust to forge a way forward, but in the meantime the 200th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone is about to be celebrated. This is such a revered local icon, an important architectural structure being the tallest three sided monument in the world, as well as being a significant beacon signalling the gateway to the South West that I do hope a way can be found to preserve it effectively for future generations.



Cracking Claims

I was proud to attend the Claims Consortium Awards evening at the Brewhouse Theatre. This company is expanding rapidly and is a model in terms of how it treats its workforce, picking up Investor in People awards and a recent Queens Award. Very well done to everyone who received an in house award on the night as well!

As ever do not hesitate if there is anything my staff or I can help you with.

All the best for now,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rebecca Pow". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Member of Parliament for Taunton Deane

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