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Rebecca Pow's E-bulletin

Tuesday 29th November 2016

Hello,

As usual it's been a very busy time as I move between Westminster and Taunton Deane, always with the good of the constituency at the heart of everything I do.

And now for the good news...

There really is some excellent news to share. I am delighted to have been instrumental in securing £1million from the Libor Fund for our Wellington Monument restoration project. The idea of restoring this iconic beacon standing proud on the Blackdown Hills and heralding the entrance to the wider South West, struck me during my first month in Parliament when there was much discussion about how to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo and with it our great war hero, the Duke of Wellington, who took his title from our charming town of Wellington. It was a pretty ambitious aim, given that the National Trust estimated it would cost £4m in



total to repair the Monument. However, once the Trust themselves (who now own it) were on board and the whole community demonstrated their immense love for this symbol by signing the petition I presented to

Parliament in their thousands and with many becoming Monument Champions it was clear that there really was the will to proceed.

The Libor Fund money (secured from banks that misbehaved over the Libor scandal, with a special category for war memorials) gives a fantastic base on which to build, in particular sets us in good stead for applying for other funds.

So very well done to everyone who has been involved and here's to us all working to get this emblem of our area reinstated for everyone to enjoy in the future.

For info re how to get involved in the Wellington Monument campaign click [HERE](#).

South West Solidarity

I've just had a trip to No 10 Downing Street to stress the need for investment and growth in the South West. We handed in a copy of the new **SW Growth Charter** which has been compiled by a group of businesses, councils and other bodies from across the region.

The charter calls for a new partnership between government and business as well as significant investment in



the region's road, rail and broadband connections. It is estimated it will produce 21,000 new jobs and deliver additional economic benefit of more than £60 billion.

Earlier the same day, I spoke in a debate on the South West economy together with many of my SW colleagues who are notably all Conservatives. I stressed the need to bring forward key projects in our area that I have been working on since my election which include the upgrade of the A358, M5 junction 25 and the Toneway/Creech Castle

corridor. I urged the Minister not to take the SW for granted, we are a force to be reckoned with and given the right tools can make an enormous contribution to the national economy.

You can see my speech in the SW Growth debate [HERE](#).

Autumn Statement

Prior to the autumn statement I had my own private meeting with the Chancellor, very much along the lines of my message during the SW debate, stressing that it is essential our promised road upgrades come to fruition especially those unlocking jobs or housing potential such as the new employment site at junction 25, and the Toneway upgrade in the wake of proposed new housing development. Mr Hammond seemed to have been listening as he announced the £21 billion New Infrastructure Fund for just such projects aimed at new transport links, homes and broadband connections. I'll be pushing hard to see some of this coming our way.

For hard-working families the rise in the tax-free allowance is welcome so people will keep more of their money. The increase in the National Living Wage and the continued freeze in fuel duty are also welcomed in Taunton Deane.

Overall forecasts show the economy will continue to grow which is good news for everyone, families, pensioners and especially businesses.

Garden Town Status

This government is determined to build more houses so that more people can have a home of their own. To have a home, whether owned, part owned or rented is something people constantly raise with me. In Taunton Deane alone there are over 3000 on the housing waiting list. I understand too however, that there is much angst relating to proposed new developments. To this end I have been pushing hard for Taunton to be considered for Garden Town status.



This would unlock funding to ensure that those developments that do go ahead are sustainable, with the correct infrastructure, facilities and green spaces, cycle and walk ways and so on to make these places really work as pleasant places for people to live. With my environmental background this is an area I am especially keen to promote. I've been working with Conservative Taunton Deane Council locally and other stakeholders on this as well as meeting with the Housing Minister in London to put the case. I wait with interest to hear the outcome.

People Flooding in to Environmental Forum

My latest **Environmental Forum** was a great success attracting a full house in Stoke St Mary village hall to hear guest speaker Neil Parish MP, Chair of the Environment, Food, Farming and Rural Affairs Select Committee speaking about the recommendations of the Committee's recent inquiry into

Flood Resilience. As a member of the Committee myself I was keen to share the findings relating to a wider approach to land use and water management as a means of tackling flooding. Suggestions included appointing a Flood Commissioner and involving water



companies to a much greater extent. There was an impressive gathering of minds with considerable accumulated knowledge in the room and a constructive sharing of ideas ensued.

In Westminster I have met with Environment Minister Therese Coffey and with Secretary of State at the Department of Communities and Local Government to call for a hastening of legislation so that the Somerset Rivers Authority percept can be applied to council tax bills to fund the flood programme.

All Sorts of Other Subjects

There's a first for everything and I recently took part in the first ever parliamentary debate on the subject of soil. That's rather bizarre I hear you say! However this is a subject dear to my heart and one that I believe deserves a lot more attention. Soil affects us all, without healthy sustainable soil we cannot produce healthy food, store carbon (which reduces climate change) or hold water to combat flooding. The creatures living in the soil may also hold the keys to our survival, for example research in the US has recently revealed the first potential new antibiotic for 10 years, and it comes from a soil organism. I was on the Environmental Audit Select Committee Soil Inquiry and amongst others things am calling on government to introduce a soil monitoring system and to consider soil in more holistic terms.

Read my speech [HERE](#).

I'm delighted that the government listened to my call, together with many others, to ban the inclusion of damaging **micro-beads** in cosmetics and personal care products. These tiny plastic pieces are being ingested by fish and causing untold damage to marine habitats. The consultation on this should start just before Christmas.

On a not dissimilar note, I was pleased to speak in a debate on Health and inequality, where I put the case for GP's issuing 'green prescriptions.' There is evidence to prove that involvement with nature and the wider outdoors including taking regular exercise can help with a range of medical conditions including mental health and obesity.

And finally on a health note I spoke in a moving debate on behalf of constituents whose lives have been blighted by inadvertently receiving contaminated blood. I believe strongly that more needs to be done to improve their quality of life and am pressing for a one off payment to be part of new government proposals for this unfortunate group of people to help ease their burden.

Sporting Activity

Recent highlights on the sporting front in the constituency include joining the throng for the exciting Taunton Town Football Club FA cup match recently and supporting the Taunton Titans rugby team. Both clubs give

a tremendous amount of pleasure to hundreds of people as well as training for many young people. An added bonus was the launch of the Taunton Cider Co at the rugby club. There is still much local love for the Taunton Cider name which has been picked up by a new company that is producing cider in the Blackdown Hills. Anything that makes a good quality local product and creates employment is to be welcomed.

Finally I am setting up an MP's business club, if you would like more details please do get in touch. And as usual if I or my staff can help with anything do contact my office.

In the meantime all the best,

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

Rebecca

01823 443062 | 0207 219 4831 | www.rebeccapow.org.uk

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