



Twitter: [@pow\\_rebecca](https://twitter.com/pow_rebecca)

Facebook: [fb.com/rebeccapow](https://facebook.com/rebeccapow)

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> February

*Hello again,*

It has been another historic week in Parliament, with late night sessions as the Bill notifying our withdrawal from the EU has been debated. Whilst I personally campaigned not to leave the EU, (and I have great respect for those who believe that we are better off staying in) the majority of people in Taunton Deane voted clearly to leave and so I voted in line with their wishes. I would like to thank everyone who has contacted me for passing on their views and comments.

There will be no let-up in debate and discussion on this subject as we move towards triggering Article 50 by the end of March. There is also plenty of food for thought emanating from the White House, with the new incumbent in place.

Aside from these momentous event my priority locally continues to be ensuring that Taunton Deane is at the forefront of all that I do, fighting our corner and endeavouring to get the best for our area.

One success, in which I have played my part together with dedicated input from Taunton Deane Council, has been securing Green Town status for Taunton, one of only three towns in the country to gain this status. Whilst this will not solve all the issues that are inevitably associated with proposed new housing developments in the area, the allocated funding (£350,000) will help towards a more sustainable future and will make it possible to bid for other funds with which to build essential infrastructure and facilities.

# Regional Emphasis

I am working increasingly with Conservative colleagues in the region to gain the South West the attention it needs to raise productivity and growth levels here.



To this end I was delighted to get a Prime Ministers Question in (all that 'bobbing' up and down was worth it) on this very subject. I cited the recent take-over of excellent local business, The Ministry of Cake, by a successful French company, as an example of how outside companies are viewing the South West as a good place in which to invest. Our SW MPs group is emphasising the importance of developing the infrastructure framework that will allow business to thrive. This includes road, rail and a suitable digital infrastructure.

I am delighted that Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling has re-confirmed his commitment to the upgrade of the A358 (many parishes have had meetings with Highways England already) and with government funding for the Taunton Rail transformation project signed off it is now important that GWR need to move ahead with their side of the bargain.

With 85% of businesses in the SW being micro businesses (employing 0 – 9 people) and many based in rural areas, adequate digital connection is essential. The recent signing of one of the final phases of Connecting Devon and Somerset's super-fast broadband programme by Gigaclear, should deliver this essential service to thousands of additional households

and businesses by 2019 providing speeds up to 33 times faster than the UK average.

Skills are another key to progress and I am continuing to highlight the benefits of the government apprenticeship schemes which are becoming more focused to deliver what business wants. The prospect of a University of Somerset here at the Bridgwater and Taunton University Centre is also edging forward.

## *Fairer Funding*

Many of you will have signed my petition calling for fairer funding for our schools. Historically, pupils in this area have received £2000 less per pupil than the best funded schools in the country with rural areas being particularly hard hit. Having campaigned long and hard on this, together with thousands of local parents and teachers I am pleased that after consulting widely the government has proposed a fairer system. This means that Somerset schools will receive 4.5% more funding. There are still some anomalies to iron out, and there will be a few losers but on the whole this should benefit our children and help our hard working teachers.

## *Tighter Rules on Dog Breeding*

I am so pleased that Secretary of State for DEFRA has listened to the recommendations of our EFFRA Select Committee inquiry and calls from the All Party Animal Welfare Group, of which I am co-chair, and today introduced tougher dog breeding licensing rules to better protect thousands of puppies. It's part of a swathe of reforms to safeguard the welfare of Britain's pets.

The plans to tighten up laws around selling pets and breeding dogs will make it completely illegal to sell puppies younger than

eight weeks and require anyone breeding and selling three or more litters of puppies a year to apply for a formal licence. Irresponsible breeders who don't stick to these rules face an unlimited fine and/or up to six months in prison.

The new rules will mean smaller establishments - sometimes called 'backstreet breeders' - which supply thousands of dogs to families each year, as well as larger commercial breeders, must meet strict welfare criteria to get a licence.

## *Cultural Offer*

I am always mindful that having a great cultural offer is as important as getting the economy on a firm footing.

ArtsTaunton, of which I am a patron, is focusing on exactly this. A specific aim is to create a top class arts venue in the county town building on existing strengths, such as the Brewhouse. Securing Creech Barrow Hill (behind the



Hydrographic) as the location for an eye catching piece of sculpture, visible to all entering the town, is another ArtsTaunton ambition with a competition being staged to choose the artist. Already up and running is the biennial Somerset Song Prize a high calibre national competition placing a special importance on the relationship between the singer and their pianist. I much enjoyed the launch and look forward to the final which is to be staged at Queens College.

Let's not forget the enjoyment we get from touring theatre companies that perform in many of our local village halls

together with much entertainment communities generate themselves, including pantos and wassailing events. Many people turned out to resurrect the Stoke St Mary wassail. This ancient tradition of blessing the apple trees took place with the singing of original Somerset wassailing songs (care of Tom Mayberry, of the Somerset Heritage Museum), hanging burnt toast in the trees for the robins, the firing of a shot gun and of course, the quaffing of copious quantities of cider.

## *Wellington Monument*

I am delighted that the project to restore our much loved Wellington Monument is making progress stimulated by the recent allocation of £1m from the Libor Fund which I was so pleased to play my part in securing. I much enjoyed the jolly candlelit carol singing at the Monument before Christmas and am looking



forward to many more events and activities being staged at the site as we begin to get our local fund raising going. Our 'Monument Champions' are doing a great job already and if anyone would like to get involved, either individually or through local groups or organisations please do get in touch. We will be looking for all kinds of input and would be pleased to hear from you. Please visit [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wellington-monument](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wellington-monument) and take part in the survey and find out more.

# *Helping the Homeless*

In Parliament, as a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Department of Communities and Local Government, I have been increasingly involved in the legislative side of business, which after all is the key role of government. I have been on the committee to enable the National Citizen Service to receive Royal Assent, putting it on a firm footing that will enable thousands of 15 – 17 year olds to take part in this excellent community programme. Students gain skills, confidence and get some experience of running community projects, all of which will benefit them in later life as well as potentially also benefitting society.

For more details visit: [www.ncsyas.co.uk/](http://www.ncsyas.co.uk/)

I was also proud to be part of the Committee working on Conservative colleague, Bob Blackmans' Private Members Bill to reduce homelessness. Sadly homelessness is all too common in Taunton and Wellington and even one rough sleeper or homeless person is one too many. Many volunteers and charities locally already do excellent work to help those in this unfortunate position but this bill, backed by funding of £48m, should go some way to helping further. It ensures all homeless people can access meaningful support to resolve their homelessness, whilst introducing measures to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place.

The Bill (which has passed its third reading in the Commons and goes to the Lords) had cross party support and really constructive input from local government, housing associations, charities including Shelter and Crisis. It's good news.

# Representing

I spend much time meeting with Ministers on an individual basis to feed in ideas from constituents, on all manner of subjects, whether it be calling for the dermatology department at Musgrove hospital to remain open; calling for greater understanding of the demands on nurses and GPs; for the right climate for our farmers to thrive in the post EU world as well as the right protections for the environment and much more besides. In addition, whenever I can I speak in relevant debates. These are as diverse as speaking on: Violence against girls and women; the rural economy and exiting the EU; calling for a complete ban on elephant ivory and a call for the right digital platforms to enable small, local and community radio stations, like Tone FM and 10Radio in Wiveliscombe to be established so that they are able to transmit digitally without prohibitive cost.



As you can see life is very varied with never a dull moment. My door is always open however should you need to contact me.

You can look back at any of my speeches on [www.hansard.parliament.uk/](http://www.hansard.parliament.uk/)

And do follow me on Twitter (@pow\_rebecca) and Facebook ([www.fb.com/rebeccapow](http://www.fb.com/rebeccapow)) to keep updated with what I'm doing.



Rebecca

01823 443062 | 020 7219 4831  
[rebecca.pow.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:rebecca.pow.mp@parliament.uk)