



Good afternoon from Westminster!

As ever, it has been a busy two weeks for me in Westminster, taking part in some of the most significant Parliamentary debates for 40 years. I have of course been busy in the constituency, squeezing in two jam-packed days, taking part in the public health consultation in Chipping Norton, and still going out knocking on doors to speak with constituents. Of course, I have been responding to all your emails and letters on anything from backing the local bookie to the NHS – keep them coming!

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1. Deer Park Medical Centre



This has been my top priority since being elected. I promised to fight to ensure that every avenue is fully considered to keep Deer Park open. This is a well-run, well-used and popular service for West Witney and surrounding villages and the decision to close should never have been made so lightly.

I have met with all stakeholders to urge further discussion, worked with colleagues in Parliament and raised the profile of this issue through local television, radio and press. Last week, I wrote to the Oxfordshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee urging them to vote and refer this matter to the Secretary of State.

I am very pleased that the [HOSC listened and unanimously agreed](#). I will do all I can at this level to ensure that we get the right result for patients and Witney as a whole. I have worked closely with the Patient Participation Group throughout this process, and I am grateful for all the work they and local representatives have done to get this matter reconsidered.

I will keep you all updated with any further progress on this; my latest update leaflet is [here](#). In the meantime, please respond to my local health survey [here](#); I very much want to hear your views.

2. Small Businesses in West Oxfordshire

I recently visited two thriving businesses in West Oxfordshire. [Siemens Magnet Technology](#) welcomed me to their headquarters in Eynsham and it was so interesting to see all the work they do. SMT are a world-leader in their field: more than 30 percent of MRI scanners worldwide have, at their heart, a superconducting magnet manufactured by SMT. You can read more about my visit [here](#).



I also officially opened the new Witney facilities for the [Oxfordshire Energy Academy](#). This amazing company has gone from strength to strength, as illustrated by their need to move to a larger premises. The company is Oxfordshire's leading provider of specialist training to the plumbing and heating industry, and offers courses to both professionals and apprentices. They even took the time to teach me the basics! You can read more about my visit and their work [here](#).

It is fantastic that both companies choose to base themselves here in West Oxfordshire. This shows that our area continues to be a place where businesses choose to stay and thrive, and are vital to our economy. I will continue to work hard to enable local businesses to succeed and have made this one of my [top local priorities](#). As ever, if you are a local business owner and have something to share with me, please do [email me](#).

3. UK's Withdrawal from the EU



Westminster has been dominated by the Parliamentary vote for the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Leaving the European Union is the most important process this country has undertaken in a generation. I spoke in the second reading, emphasising that it is time to accept that the referendum

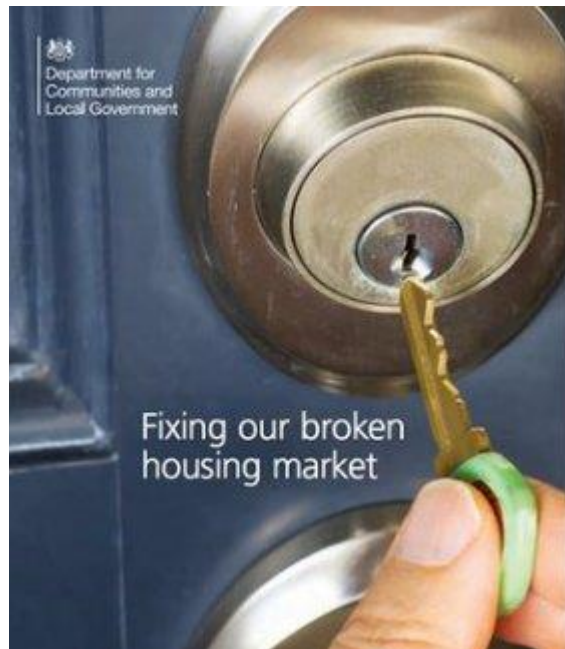
result has been decided. We must now look to the future, embrace the positives and trust the people, and that process must start now. You can read my speech in the House of Commons [here](#).

This has of course been an issue that raised strong passions on both sides. Ultimately, people voted differently all over the country. Parts of the country voted to remain and parts of the country voted to leave. What we must do now is unite behind the result of the referendum and work together to make a success of this unique opportunity. We must come together to build a more open, democratic, and global Britain.

In any event, I am committed to ensuring that all my constituents' concerns are fully considered throughout this process, regardless of how they voted in June. I spend my time in the constituency listening to businesses, charities, and those in the public sector as much as I can to ensure that I understand the challenges faced in each sector, to best place myself to delivering the best result for the people of West Oxfordshire. This is what I am determined to achieve: however you voted, we must look to the future, and embrace the positives. I shall be doing so, and I hope that you will join me in doing so too.

4. Government Housing White Paper

The White Paper sets out an ambitious plan to build the homes Britain needs - so that the housing market works for all. At present, the market is broken, because for decades not enough homes have been built. That has meant that house prices are growing faster than incomes and, alongside rising rents, this has hit potential home owners across the country. This is particularly felt here in West Oxfordshire, where it is difficult to buy an affordable home in the towns and villages where many have grown up.



This White Paper sets out ambitious, lasting reform that covers the whole of the house building process. From finding sites, to getting planning permission, and then actually building homes, the Government will take action so that it is easier and quicker to get homes built in the places that they are needed most. I look forward to seeing these new practices put in place and for a better building climate to be created which will benefit all of us.

I do not want large, unsustainable development that destroys West Oxfordshire's unique local character or our countryside. Any new build needs the infrastructure around it to also be put in place. However, I made this a [top priority](#) during the by-election and I welcome any changes which enables housing development which works for us and ensures that our children aren't priced out of their own community.

You can [read the White Paper in full here](#).

5. Parliamentary Business

Aside from the above bill, wider Parliamentary business continues and I have drawn many important matters to the attention of Ministers, from [Trident](#) to [Yemen](#), [self-employment](#) to [Northern Ireland](#).

You can read all of my contributions to Parliament [here](#).

I have also been elected to the Backbench Business Committee, where I will help decide what backbench business to bring to the House; an exciting first Select Committee which will enable me to be fully involved in the matters discussed in Parliament.

I am also on my first Bill Committee, currently scrutinising the Pension Schemes Bill, a process where I work with Parliamentary colleagues to go through the Bill line by line. This is a vital part in the process of making legislation and I am proud to be a part of this. I further spoke about this Bill [here](#).

6. Meeting with Ministers

I have lobbied Ministers on behalf of constituents about several important issues in West Oxfordshire. Sticking to [my list of top priorities](#), I have spoken to the relevant Ministers about business rates, the A40 and broadband. All are key issues in the constituency and I am keen for progress to be made on all fronts.



I spoke with the Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling, about the progress being made to improve the A40. I know that [Oxfordshire County Council](#) [have a proposal to improve congestion on the A40](#) through the creation of a park and ride service in Eynsham and a bus lane from there to Oxford. I spoke with the Minister to make him fully aware of how vital this road is to my

constituents and to ask his advice on further Department for Transport help to tackle this key issue. He and I continue to discuss progress.

I met with Minister of State for Digital and Agriculture, Matt Hancock, to discuss the future of superfast broadband in West Oxfordshire. Living in Bladon, and as the District Councillor for The Bartons, I am acutely aware of how poorly served rural areas are. Fast, reliable broadband is essential for homes to benefit from online services and for UK businesses to compete globally. As many of you will know, Cotswold Broadband recently withdrew from its contract with WODC to provide superfast broadband to the most rural parts of West Oxfordshire. I urge you all to keep up to date with WODC's procurement process [here](#). I made the Minister fully aware of this issue and have discussed with him what actions he is taking to bring fast broadband to rural areas such as ours.

I have further met with the Secretary of State for Business, Greg Clark, to discuss the impact of the revaluation of business rates on local businesses in West Oxfordshire. I am proud of the great work achieved by the Government to help small businesses. It has taken action to create a climate which encourages businesses to grow and to remove barriers to entry, such as cutting corporation tax.

However, I am keen to ensure that the Minister is fully aware of the impact of this revaluation on small businesses in West Oxfordshire, which are so essential to our local economy.

7. School Visits

It has been fantastic to welcome two schools from West Oxfordshire to Parliament in recent weeks. I met pupils from the Springfield School in Witney at the education centre and I had a Q&A session with sixth form students from Bartholomew School in Eynsham.

It so important for students to have the opportunity to learn about the centre of government in the UK and I greatly enjoyed the chance to speak with them. Should any other schools wish to visit Parliament, please [email me](#).



8. Parkinson's UK

PARKINSON'S^{UK}
CHANGE ATTITUDES.
FIND A CURE.
JOIN US.

On my most recent constituency day, I met with constituents who are have created a pilot programme for those recently diagnosed with Parkinson's, called First Steps, supported by Parkinson's UK.

This group is run by those also suffering from the disease and aims

to help people come to terms with their diagnosis and get the information and support they need. It is so important to push for new treatment options outside and alongside medication. I was interested to learn about the work they are doing at the Witney Lakes and I look forward to working closely with them in the future.

9. APPG for the Armed Forces

I am a strong champion of the armed forces, both personally and because we proudly have RAF Brize Norton based within the constituency. I am therefore a very active member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Armed Forces. Through the APPG, I have met with many prominent members for the Armed Forces, and will continue to do all I can to promote the great work carried out by our service men and women. You can see a wider list of APPG's I am linked to [here](#).

10. OCCG Consultation on the future of Oxfordshire's healthcare



I attended Oxfordshire Health bosses' [consultation meeting in Chipping Norton](#) about the first phase their consultation on the future of healthcare in Oxfordshire. I have strongly argued that this consultation should not be split as it is impossible to look at services in isolation. This was shown through the people's anger in

Chipping Norton. I have been speaking to all stakeholders to arrange a further consultation in Chipping Norton, at a time which works for all – after all, the public are the most important part of a public consultation.

I strongly urge as many residents as possible to attend the next consultation meeting on 16th February in Witney. This will look at the future of services at the Horton General in Banbury, and its related impact on Chipping Norton and surrounding areas. I ask residents to have their say on this crucial issue [here](#).

11. Want more?

This update contains just a snapshot of my work locally and in Westminster; I am of course very aware you will have big issues in your area (or on your mind) which I haven't covered and hope you know you can get in touch at any time. Much more also exists on [my website](#) and [YouTube](#).

12. Get in touch!

You can also [follow me on Twitter](#) for instant updates on my work or find me [on Facebook](#) and join that community.

For any casework queries please email me at robert.courts.mp@parliament.uk

You can also take a look at [my columns](#) written exclusively for the Witney Gazette.

Hope you are all doing well and I look forward to updating you on my work later this month.



Robert Courts

MP for Witney

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Promoted by Dominic Coupe on behalf of Robert Courts both of 58-60 High Street, Witney OX28 6HJ.