

We were pleased to have been able to meet up with Robert Courts, our local MP, and to have the opportunity to ask him a few questions:

Witney Letterbox (WL): Can you update us on the latest position regarding the A40 Petition.

Robert Courts (RC): Progress is being made; the County Council have put in a bid to the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) to provide funds for a Park and Ride at Eynsham and dualling the A40 from Witney up to the new Park and Ride.

WL: How will the Eynsham Garden Village plans impact on road improvement plans?

RC: The Local Area Plan ensures that infrastructure is included in housing development plans and we can therefore plan in advance for the likely increase in traffic as a result of housing developments.

WL: What about rail links in the area?

RC: There are proposals to make Long Hanborough a transport hub for West Oxfordshire. This will include installing a second track to double the line through Hanborough, putting in an additional platform, better parking and integrated bus links to between Witney, Eynsham and Hanborough Station. In summary, the two priorities regarding transport links in West Oxfordshire are to look at upgrading the A40 and to upgrade the Cotswold Line.

WL: The increase in Business Rates is a problem for small businesses in the area. What is being done to ensure Business Rates are fairer?

RC: The Government is well aware that higher Business Rates are a problem for small businesses and have introduced Business Rate Relief which many small businesses have benefitted from. There needs to be a balance between making things easier for small businesses and taxing the digital economy to ensure a fairer playing field. Free parking encourages shoppers to come into Witney and not shop on-line which means that local businesses are supported by

the community. Burford, Witney and Chipping Norton all have great individual businesses because they are supported by local community. If we want local shops to thrive, we need to support them.

WL: Can you update us about the provision of GP services in Witney?

RC: The Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (health bosses) and the District Council meet regularly to discuss housing development plans and the provision of medical services. As the local population increases, the need for more medical services is being addressed. It is difficult to give a timescale on when these services will be increased as the type of health service required depends on the demographic of the local population. I meet regularly with local GP practices who have given assurances that there is capacity to treat all patients in the area.

WL: Can you update us about the provision of affordable housing in the area

RC: West Oxfordshire is a lovely area to live with full employment and great businesses but it is a very expensive area and the lack of affordable housing is one of the biggest issues we face. West Oxfordshire District Council have included the provision of affordable housing in the Local Plan and large developments are required to include a proportion of affordable housing. We also need to look at encouraging the number of self-build homes and off site, timber framed and modular homes, such as those supplied by Stewart Milne and Ede Homes, which are quick and cheap to build.

The Local Plan provides a framework for housing developments to be integrated with GP services, transport links and education. Developers are required to contribute to the local infrastructure and Government is looking at tightening up the rules to ensure that developers actually deliver planned affordable housing and infrastructure such as community buildings and new roads.

WL: Thank you, Robert, for taking the time to talk to us.

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