

Defending Our Rural Area

As family farms across West Worcestershire were suddenly threatened with Inheritance Tax bills, I met with local farmers to show my support and raised their concerns with the Chancellor. The measures as proposed tax our food producers risking thousands of local jobs and our national food security. The Government partially reversed this policy at Christmas and I want to thank all the local groups who took the time to actively campaign against this policy. I still want to see a full reversal of this change, but I fear it will now require a change of Government.

This Government clearly does not understand our rural way of life. There are now proposals to change shotgun licensing processes and to bring in a total ban of trail hunting. Having met with local sporting clubs and local kennels and listened to the strong feedback of local people, I reiterated my support for traditional country pursuits and I oppose any change to the law.

Standing up for flood-hit communities

Our local towns and villages have benefited from a succession of flood defence schemes - at Upton-upon-Severn, Kempsey, Powick, Uckinghall and Pershore. After I made an urgent last-minute intervention with the Floods Minister at Christmas, I was relieved that the Severn Stoke flood defence scheme is now fully-funded and spades should be in the ground soon. I continue to campaign for the permanent flood defences for Tenbury Wells but late last year, I lobbied successfully to ensure that £1.8 million will be spent this year to improve the flood resilience of nearly 200 individual properties in the town.

Championing the local economy and cost of living

Local employers tell me that the choices made by our Chancellor at two Budgets make it harder to grow, to take on new staff and to expand their operations. Our local pubs, high street businesses and food producers have found the last year particularly difficult as they face a fresh round of employer tax, staffing costs and dreaded red tape. After I raised the plight of local pubs, the Chancellor offered a minor concession on their rates. I've also led a successful national campaign to keep the number of Post Offices stable and to use our local Post Office network to deliver more banking services for local people.

Lots of you will be worried about the cost of energy, and I have successfully called for support from the Chancellor for rural households with higher heating oil and LPG bills and swift regulatory action to curtail price gouging by suppliers. Many pensioners who saw their Winter Fuel Payments taken away last Autumn were relieved to see the payments reinstated after I spoke out repeatedly against the change. I also don't think this is the right time for the Chancellor to be increasing fuel duty for the first time in fifteen years.

Being a strong voice in Parliament

In Westminster, the Malvern Hills Bill, which proposes changes to the way the Hills are managed, continues its detailed scrutiny in the House of Lords. I've also been raising Royal Mail delivery problems with senior management, Severn Trent problems with their top brass and mobile signals and superfast broadband connectivity with all the relevant businesses.

As ever, I am happy to take up any issue for local residents and parish councils, so please do not hesitate to contact me on harriett.baldwin.mp@parliament.uk.