



Last weekend I helped my wife and children decorate our Christmas tree. Like many other people at this time of the year, I took a moment to reflect on the highs and lows of 2016 and to look ahead to the brand new year around the corner.

Politically, it has been a year like no other I can remember. We voted for Brexit and David Cameron was replaced by Theresa May only 20 days later; Donald Trump won the US Presidential elections in November, whilst populist political parties appear to be on the rise across Europe, in countries like Italy, France, Greece and the Netherlands. A new PM, a new ministerial team, and leadership elections in the Labour Party and UKIP. Abroad, there have been heart-breaking scenes, and hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions displaced, in Syria and terrorist attacks in Brussels, Germany, Paris and Turkey killing hundreds of innocent people. As well as reflecting on the obvious flaws of humankind and the fragility of peace in the World, we must always remember how much we owe our armed forces, police officers and counter terrorism teams, who regularly put their lives at risk to keep us safe.

There has also been much good news. Despite the uncertainties over Brexit, the British economy continues to grow, with the manufacturing and service sectors doing well. Unemployment is at an eleven-year low and our economy is growing faster than any of the other G7 nations. Our Olympic and Paralympic teams did us proud in Rio in August, winning more medals for Great Britain than any year since 1908. Andy Murray, voted Sport Personality of the Year for the third time, not only won a Gold, but also reclaimed the Wimbledon title for the second time and, to cap it off, became World number one. Best of all, in my view, the England Rugby Union team went unbeaten throughout 2016.

Whilst all this has been going on, my team and I have been working hard on your behalf to get the best possible deal for you locally. With colleagues, I helped secure an additional £17 million over two years for NYCC and Hambleton, Ryedale and Scarborough in the Local Government Funding Settlement, along with an extra £7 million per annum for schools across North Yorkshire. I have successfully campaigned for more money for supported housing for important facilities such as Ryedale YMCA and helped ensure that Government plans to sell off the Land Registry were ditched. We've been given the green light for the improvements to Barton Hill crossroads, between York and Malton, and I have been pushing hard to ensure that we have a workable solution for the economic bottleneck on the A64 by enlisting the support of the Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling, regularly meeting ministers, Highways England and Transport for the North and joining the A64 Growth Partnership to make the case for a dual carriageway all the way to Malton. I have chaired the APPG for Poverty to ensure affordable housing is a top priority, because I believe that the cost of housing is a fundamental cause of poverty in rural areas.

There is still plenty to do. Whilst I was at the forefront of securing a fracking ban from wells drilled at the surface of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and successfully pushed for independent environmental monitoring in the Vale of Pickering by the British Geological Survey, I will continue to ensure that proper and robust regulations are effective. Last year I set up the APPG for Shale Gas Regulation and Planning, to take evidence from a range of stakeholders and protest groups to make recommendations to Government and that work will continue. I have always said that, whilst supportive in principle of the domestic production of energy, I will oppose any activities if they cannot be done in a way that is respectful to our landscape, protects public health and is friendly to the environment.

Top priorities for next year will be the delivery of superfast broadband and mobile phone coverage right across the constituency, which will make a huge difference to our local economy and prevent companies and young people from drifting away out of sheer frustration. I also want to see, and will work towards, a devolution deal for Yorkshire, which will bring investment in infrastructure, skills and digital connectivity and means we can start to redress the imbalance between the North and South.

I am working closely with the parents of Claudia Lawrence, missing for 7 long years, and have secured Government support for a Ten Minute Rule Bill on Guardianship, which, if successful, will allow trusted family or friends the opportunity to manage the missing person's financial affairs and avoid suffering unnecessary problems whilst their whereabouts is unknown.

Over the next 12 months, I will continue to travel the length and breadth of the constituency to meet as many of you as possible, so that I can listen to your views and concerns and represent your interests both in Parliament and in the forthcoming Brexit negotiations. I remain honoured that you have placed your trust in me as your MP in one of the most beautiful constituencies in the United Kingdom and will do everything I can to repay that trust in 2017.

At this wonderful time of the year, our thoughts and actions should, quite rightly focus on family and friends but also on those less fortunate than ourselves; building a fairer future for all is the very reason why I decided to stand for Parliament. May I wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.