



## **EASTER NEWSLETTER 2016**

Spring is here; it's time to grasp the new opportunities open to us with renewed vigour. Britain is growing faster than every other major economy, more people are in work and earning more. We need to keep making the decisions, often very tough ones, to keep the nation on the right track. So much has been achieved since 2010 but we still have much to do. The annual deficit, the gap between what we spend and our national income, has been reduced by over 50% but is still in excess of £75bn per annum, and our total national debt exceeds £1.6trn.

The budget did much to help taxpayers and small business, but the focus has understandably been centered on the changes to Personal Independence Payments. The changes were never intended to disadvantage those in genuine need of extra support to be able to run their lives, but rather to make a more suitable assessment of those who can lead normal lives so that we can make sure that benefits were targeted to those most in need. In 2013 the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance, worth up to £55.25 a week, was handed out to 140,000 people suffering from back pain. There were 18,000 awards for alcohol and drug abuse, 25,000 for asthma and 1,500 for frailty. The care component of the benefit, which is worth up to £79.15 a week, was paid to 135,000 people with back pain. There were 21,000 awards last year for asthma, 19,000 for alcohol or drug abuse and nearly 1,000 for people suffering from multiple allergy syndrome. The number of claimants had spiralled to 3.2million.

The benefits system often failed the very people it was supposed to help, writing people with disabilities off to a life on benefits, instead of giving them the help they needed to get into work. Over the past five years, the Government has gone about fixing this, helping those who are capable of taking steps back into work so they have the financial security that comes with a regular wage. Initiatives such as the Disability Confident campaign, employment support funding through Access to Work, and reforms to disability and unemployment benefits have led to significant progress in increasing the number of disabled people in work. The most recent figures show a rise of more than 200,000 over the past year.

However, I quite understand that reductions to PIP were very controversial, particularly in the context of reduction to corporation tax and capital gains tax. I, and a number of other MPs, made my feelings known to colleagues and ministers, and am pleased that the proposed changes have been reversed.

There is so much more we can aim for locally. I am encouraged by what I think Devolution could bring. The Northern Powerhouse will boost trade, transport and quality of life in the Thirsk and Malton constituency. More decision making, in the region *for* the region, means we can get exactly what we need, not what others think we need.

There is much uncertainty about our future in Europe, but whatever the outcome, we need to move on together after the result and make the very best of the decision we make. I am planning several

debates with UKIP across the constituency to help residents hear both sides of the argument regarding Brexit and I hope many of you will come along.

My principal responsibility is to improve lives in my local community. The Yorkshire spirit can move mountains given the right opportunities. We desperately need better broadband and mobile connections and I am continually meeting with providers to seek the best options. We are holding a Small Business Day in June covering communications, pensions auto-enrolment, the EU and exporting, where ideas will be shared between local and national attendees. I am aware that fast communication links are vital just as reliable transport links are and was pleased to see that the HS3 link between Leeds and Manchester was given the green light in the Budget. I continue to seek significant improvements to the A64 and am pressing the Chancellor, transport ministers, Highways England and Transport for the North for a meaningful solution. The Government is giving the go-ahead to £24 million of investment from the Local Growth Fund, to improve roads across North Yorkshire.

As peak tourism season approaches we want to welcome more people to our coast and countryside especially as the Tour de Yorkshire arrives, we don't want getting into our constituency to be as hard as cycling up Sutton Bank! I recently met a group of travel representatives from Europe at Castle Howard who were seeing what we could offer visitors. On Thursday Nikky and I enjoyed a tour of Byland Abbey followed by tea and scones at the Abbey Inn, I recommend the destination to visitors and locals alike, the scones are the best we've ever had. I feel very proud that we have so much to show and share. It was also fun to take part in the "Clean for the Queen" this month along with other families keeping tidy our attractive villages.

This season our green and pleasant land looks particularly vibrant and it is thanks to our farmers and landowners who are the caretakers of the countryside. The farming industry is facing many challenges on all sides. Payments have been slow and frustration high. Prices at the farmgate are not as they should be, considering the quality of produce and that the red-tape is enough to tie you in knots, but they continue to feed us and I will continue to support them in any way I can. I regularly meet with and speak to representatives from the NFU and CLA as well as visit local farmers who show me and explain exactly what life in the fields is really like right now. I was grateful for the time Robin Bosomworth took to talk to me about his family business and show me the effects of flooding on his land. Experienced farmers like Robin have moved with the times, developing and diversifying on his farm. Farmers are seeking ways to lessen the effects on their income of commodity price variation and they are looking at different practices to cultivate the land to protect it from the damage caused by flood water. The cost of milk production still needs addressing as our British dairy industry must survive and thrive. Consumers, supermarkets and dairies should recognise the value of not just their pint but the value of our herds. British stock is something to be prized, just visit the Yorkshire Agricultural Show this July to see what wonderful beasts are raised in the county.

We must celebrate our good fortune and enjoy our home-grown meat. I recently attended the Pigs and Poultry event in Westminster with local farmers in attendance. We should be very proud of our world-leading animal husbandry and make sure that imports are produced to the same high standards.

With the freeze on beer and cider duty we can sup our pints produced by our local breweries and presses with even more relish. Events like the Malton Food Fair showcase some of the best food in

the land and new developments, like plans for the livestock market and business park near Eden Camp, need encouraging for what future value they can add. The site has been awarded "Food Enterprise Zone" status by the Government which should encourage further investment particularly from food and farming-related enterprises.

House building is good for our local economy and young people who want to get on the ladder. We need to make sure, however, that housing is built in the right place and with suitable infrastructure, local services and amenities that can cope with any increase in population. I was delighted to hold a meeting in the constituency with local community representatives and the government neighbourhood planning guru, John Howell OBE MP, to talk about how we get the balance right. This is another example of how the local community must be involved in the decision making process. Please let me know if you want more information on how to develop your own neighbourhood plan.

Where we live and what we really need in that location is a matter for all. In Thirsk I am urging the residents to speak up for the future of the Lambert Memorial Hospital. A public meeting has been held and I believe the ward needs to reopen and we need reassurances that the services offered at the facility will be secure for future generations.

The young people of Yorkshire are actively engaged in politics. I have recently enjoyed speaking to university students in Sheffield and also joined a debate along with other MPs in front of a large, knowledgeable and questioning audience. Last week was National Apprenticeship Week and I went to Thirsk based SuperSkills Limited who deliver construction training to hear about their work with young people.

I have hosted a number of visits to Westminster from local constituents, including a Q&A with pupils from Norton College. There was good news on fairer funding for our rural schools in the Budget, so it's great to see that the campaigning we did has been recognised. I am happy to speak to any students, as I enjoyed discussing topical issues as a young teenager myself, and I appreciate their often fresh and inspiring approach to many topical subjects.

Protecting what we have is of undeniable importance. I continue to press for clear guidelines and regular checks to be part of any shale gas exploration, if it is approved in our constituency. The new APPG on Shale Gas Regulation and Planning I have established has invited contributions from all sides of the debate to give evidence. The cross party members of the APPG are committed to safeguarding our countryside and environment. We must continue to look at greener sources of energy.

Trialling new innovations is part of developing a better future whether it is new energy sources or new medical advances, for example, we must look at the worldwide concern about the continued effectiveness of current antibiotics. Antibiotic Research UK, based in the constituency, is the world's first charity to tackle Anti-Microbial Resistance, a looming global danger of catastrophic proportions. I have expressed my support for this work and asked David Cameron during Prime Minister's Questions to meet with me to discuss the possibility of the Government allocating more funding for the charity.

I have also been supporting the campaign to introduce a new law on guardianship, legislation that has been championed by Mr and Mrs Lawrence, parents of Claudia. I very much hope that this will be forever known as Claudia's Law.

There will always be new challenges, of course, and that is why I enjoy this job. There is so much to be done locally, nationally and globally to make our planet a better place to live. We may not agree on everything, but I am always keen to hear your views and appreciate the fact that you always seem happy to hear mine.

With busy times ahead let's put the spring in our step. I wish you a Happy Easter.