

Spreading prosperity around the country

I am all in favour of policies which promote growth and greater prosperity generally, and in support of any measures which can help catch up by the lower income parts of the UK. In many cases the policies required are the same.

The government is going to spend more and do more on infrastructure. Ensuring good broadband with high speeds in all parts of the country is essential to faster growth. Much of the investment can be private sector, as it should generate its own return. Where public sector pump priming is necessary there should continue to be clawback provisions in the investment agreements to protect taxpayers.

Investment in better transport is needed everywhere in the UK. London has needed substantial extra investment in the tube network because it is being impeded by its own success, with crowded tunnels and trains often leading to temporary station or platform closures to handle the numbers. London does not get much investment in new roads as there is so little space to include them. Outside London more road capacity is needed for buses and cars and more cycle lane provision. Commuter train services into many cities and towns need improving, with more trains, more comfortable trains and more reliable trains.

The government also needs to look at taxation. Too many taxes in the UK are set at rates that diminish the total revenue by deterring transactions and investments. High Stamp duties cut the volume of property transactions, which means sub optimal use of properties with people feeling taxed out of changing their property for one they can best use. IR35 is deterring self employment and losing the UK contracts. High Vehicle Excise duties have helped hit sales for UK made new vehicles, though they are greener and cleaner than the old ones they could replace. National Insurance and the training levy are taxes on employment when we want to promote more jobs. The current rate of Capital Gains Tax puts people off selling assets they hold that could be better developed or used by others.

The Chancellor needs a budget for jobs and growth. That should include reducing tax penalties on work, on investment and on transactions.

More police for Wokingham and

Bracknell

The local Police Commander has confirmed to me they are pressing ahead with recruiting and training an additional 17 police officers for our local area, out of the total increase of 183 for Thames Valley Police as a whole. I look forward to their arrival and wish the local force success in their work against crime.

What does an MP do?

There are 650 different ways of being an MP. It requires your presence in Parliament on many specified times including late nights, following the rules of conduct and Parliamentary process. It also affords each MP considerable scope to decide how to spend the many days and hours when the Parliamentary timetable does not dictate what is being done.

The main task of an MP is to scrutinise government actions, question Ministers, debate proposed new legislation and revisit old legislation that may be failing. This can be done in Parliament by a number of means, and outside through speeches, . blogs, media interviews and the rest. MPs lead a national debate to improve matters, and to expose things that need improving.

Some MPs follow the news and social media, intervening on whatever is topical. Some MPs specialise in particular subjects so their interventions come with more expertise and knowledge behind them. Some MPs allow the agenda to be driven by their party, others try to get changes to their party's stance on things. Some MPs campaign to get a change to a law or government policy. Many do this based on professional campaign lobby groups and organisations who supply them with research and back up. Some of us run campaigns for ourselves based on what our constituents are telling us and on our perceptions of what changes would improve public services or the economy.

The MP needs to get the right balance between listening and leading, between taking the views of the constituents to government to get explanation or change, and explaining the views of government or Opposition to constituents. The MP also needs to find a good work balance between time spent in the constituency meeting people, attending events and dealing with problems, and time spent in Westminster putting the case of constituents to government and participating in the debates and law making for the UK as a whole.

Some MPs try to become a sort of super Councillor locally. This is difficult to make work, as the proper Councillors have the powers to settle local budgets, make planning decisions and guide local services. The MP has no powers in any of these areas and may be resented by those who do have the powers if he or she grandstands too much on what they should be doing. The MP

is ,however, often seen by many constituents as the Complaints department about any public service or planning failing they perceive, so each MP has to work out how to handle that perceived role and whether it is possible in particular cases to be a force for the good or for change in local matters. There is opportunity for joint working with local Councils as they often need government funding and approvals.

It does help to live in the local area so then your time spent shopping or being out and about is more time when you are available to constituents if they have something pressing they want to tell you. It also means they can see you are experiencing the same local problems they are if there are road works or flash floods or whatever nuisance comes to plague us.

[A better Wokingham](#)

On Friday evening Wokingham Conservatives held a thank you party for the volunteers who helped with the General election.

After I had paid tribute to those who went out in all weathers to deliver leaflets and talk to voters I reminded them of the four point plan for Wokingham I set out in my main election address. I suggested to the Councillors present that we draw on that when determining the local Manifesto for the Council elections this coming May.

Where improved and safer junctions and highways, better school buildings, more police and a wider range of social care requires more money I will continue to press for government increases. We are now seeing some of this extra money coming through, so I look forward to working with Councillors to see we get value for the extra money with visible improvements in local services and facilities.

[The “job” of an MP](#)

With the arrival of many new MPs at Westminster this week for their first year in office I will write a few pieces about the role of an MP, inviting your comments on what you want us to do.

Being an MP is not just a “job”. It is a way of life. My first advice to new colleagues is you are an MP 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Your time “working” may be closer to the standard 40 hour week of a “full time” employee, but for all 168 hours of the week you are an MP.

You are on call all the time in case some disaster strikes your constituency or our country. The constituency cases and emails come in at week-ends as well as during the week and sometimes need urgent replies.

You may be sitting at home listening to the news, but that may trigger some need to intervene following a news item. You may be in the local shops, but may then see something which needs following up for the sake of constituents.

I have included the 56 hours you are asleep or relaxing in bed though you would be wise not to take your MP work to bed with you. I do so because if you spend time in the wrong bed or share a bed with an inappropriate person you would soon find out that the media and public thought your bedtime a matter of public concern and debate.

Let us suppose you manage to carry out your duties in Parliament and answering emails, and dealing with constituency queries and cases in say 40-50 hours a week on average, you will have to accept that some weeks your working hours will be much longer. My second piece of advice is do not fight the need to be in Parliament when it is sitting and debating and voting on important matters. Surely that is what you have struggled to be able to do. Some MPs no sooner get elected than they are nagging the whips to allow them free time when Parliament is debating and deciding important issues. This leaves them tense and the party feeling a bit let down by them as the whips agonise over which request they can allow. There are days when we sit beyond 10pm and need to be there for a variety of good reasons. You also cannot do constituency correspondence on an ipad whilst taking a serious interest in a debate or Question time. If you are in the chamber it needs your attention.

Parliament meets to hold votes and make decisions about matters of interest to most people around 100 days a year. If those days coincide with a wedding anniversary, an important family birthday or a social event you just want to do you are likely to be disappointed. Explain in advance to friends and family that there are times when Parliament must come first. It is always possible to make up for that unfortunate truth by having a bigger and better celebration at the next available Friday or week-end when Parliament will not be wanting you in the evening or at all. Other Parliamentary days totalling around 70 offer debates which you may or may not wish to join, without votes you have to attend, so they offer more flexibility. For around 17 weeks a year or 85 week days Parliament is in recess, and there are 104 weekend days off. This allows considerable flexibility on how to organise events outside Westminster, meet the need to do things in the constituency and have time for yourself and your family. It is always a good idea to book out family time for non Parliamentary days well in advance and to stick to it in most cases.