

Business Rates in Wokingham

I have received the enclosed letter from Councillor Charlotte Haitham Taylor, the Leader of Wokingham Borough Council.

Councillor Haitham Taylor explains that the council is taking steps to provide relief to businesses in Wokingham affected by the regeneration works.

I welcome these steps and would encourage any local businesses affected by the regeneration works to seek further help from the council.



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Cllr Charlotte Haitham Taylor
Leader of Wokingham Borough Council
PO Box 150, Shute End
Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 1BN

The Rt Hon John Redwood MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

30th October 2017

Dear John,

RE: Your letter of 9th October 2017

Thank you for your letter of 9th October 2017 regarding the current ratings system. It is well timed as I was about to contact you on this very issue

We have been meeting with the local businesses and, as part of a wider support package, have provided free expert rating advice to guide them through the new 'Check Challenge Appeal' system that was introduced with the new 2017 rating list. The response from our local businesses matches the national response from corporate ratepayers and rating experts alike who have identified fundamental flaws with the new system. The system seems to be designed to deter rather than encourage a resolution of valuation issues and of course this applies equally to temporary change of circumstances as well as permanent valuation adjustments. It is an extremely complicated system to understand and administer. The process could take up to nearly three years and offers no quick response to urgent situations such as in Wokingham town centre.

Our retailers are asking what assistance can be given to them to help them navigate this difficult system and to ensure responses are received in a timely manner – your comments on this are welcome which we can then feed back to our retailers

I referred above to a package of support that we are providing, this currently includes:

- Free parking in Wokingham Town Centre car parks from 3pm to 8am
- We have provided and funded professional advice and guidance to any shop wanting to apply for Business Rate Relief



- We are funding promotional videos with Wokingham Town Council and Wokingham Business Association (WBA) to actively promote business as usual in the town which will be launched early in November to particularly support the run up to Christmas
- We are supporting and part-funding with the Town Council some additional marketing material promoting 'Business as Usual' to encourage footfall and this will include some advertising in the local press and publicity in Wokingham Borough News, again with a focus on the run up to Christmas but this support will continue into 2018.
- The Wokingham Business Association is organising a Christmas 'Scavenger' Hunt initiative to bring families into the town in the festive period. Wherever possible we will support the promotion of this via social media and it is also appearing in the Borough News which will be delivered to homes early in December. Similar support will also be available for other projects coming forward
- We are running a workshop session for local businesses at Wokingham Town Hall to discuss ideas around how everyone, Councils, WBA and individual businesses can work collectively to best promote the town.
- Funding of adverts in the local press marketing the town and have offered to part fund other marketing campaigns
- We are organising a rolling programme of drop in sessions at the Town Hall which will allow residents and businesses quick and easy access to officers so that questions and concerns can be picked up very quickly
- Use of development fencing and hoardings for retailers signage and town promotional information

Alongside this we have also started to establish a Marketing group made up of Town and Borough officers and the Business Association to continue to generate ideas which can be taken forward both as short term gains and a longer term strategy to promote Wokingham.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Charlotte Haitham Taylor

Leader of Wokingham Borough Council

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