

National election, local matters (for the Wokingham Borough part of the constituency)

The main issues that have dominated in Wokingham Borough in recent years are all related to one thing – the fast growth rate in new homes and in the numbers of people living in our community. Wokingham is a welcoming place to newcomers. Some growth is helpful to all. The problems occur if the growth is too sudden or too large.

It leads to strains on roads, public transport, NHS facilities, school places and other parts of our infrastructure.

The Council has difficult decisions to make about when and how to expand their local services. Put in school places too early, and the bills go up. Established schools lose pupils and money as the new schools open. Forest has lost pupil numbers thanks to the opening of the new Bohunt school. Leave it too late, and there are insufficient places. There is a scramble to find somewhere in the area, with longer travel times for pupils and a strain on school resources.

We are short of space on the roads, and up against limits on some public transport. I worked away to get a new station at Wokingham. Reading station has now been given much needed extra train capacity. Crossrail will soon provide a better service into central and east London. The Council is building the Shinfield, Arborfield and Winnersh by passes, and putting in two new link roads and a new railway bridge in Wokingham. The sooner this is done the better. The roadworks themselves compound difficulties, and current capacity is far below what is needed.

The government is promising some control over the pace of welcoming new migrants to the UK in future. I wish to work with the Council to come up with a fairer number of new homes the area can take to persuade the government we need a sustainable and realistic growth figure. The Council and MP in the next Parliament also need to make common cause and to put enough investment in so the developments improve the provision of transport and public service.

We need to keep enough green spaces and areas to absorb water run off, as too much development increases flood risk and removes too many countryside areas. We also wish to keep green spaces and gaps between settlements to keep the best of our local landscape.

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