

New Year message

I wish you all a successful and prosperous 2019. I expect to see improvements locally and nationally, as we continue to enjoy record levels of employment and as pay goes up by more than prices. We enjoy one of the lowest levels of unemployment of anywhere in the country, and see many flourishing businesses investing in the future and confident about the outlook.

I am well aware of the things that people want us to sort out. Parliament and government needs to agree a way forward to implement the referendum result without damaging jobs and the economy. Locally there is work to be done in making it easier to get to work and to take the children to school, with better transport arrangements of all kinds. There needs to be a better balance between building more homes, and looking after the quality of life of all of us who already live here.

The Wokingham constituency had a good end to 2018. I was pleased that the government listened to my pleas for more money for our local Councils for 2019-20. Wokingham Borough got one of the largest increases in spending power, with a gain of 6.3%, and West Berkshire was well above average at 4.2%. This means our Councillors can now make service improvements, and give local taxpayers a better deal next year.

Wokingham Town Centre came back to life after long lasting works for a facelift. Shoppers have already taken to the new stores that have opened and we look forward to more to come in 2019. Let's ensure people can get into the centre easily, and can park without high fees or penalties when they want time to shop or visit a café or restaurant. There are good ways to spend time and money in our town centres. Pothole money and more cash for social services which I have pressed for will also help provide better local services next year.

I have been busy telling Network Rail we are against the train whistles, seeking a better answer on plane noise, helping constituents put the case on Post Office services in Wokingham, assisting the Councils where they need government help, arguing for better answers to problems of poverty and homelessness and encouraging more investment in our public services and utility networks.

I am optimistic about our prospects for 2019, though I am concerned about the impact of tax rises on car and homebuyers and the very tough stance of the Bank of England which is slowing the economy. I am urging the government to cut taxes a bit more particularly where they are doing harm and reducing the revenue, and to spend a bit more on our priorities, as they can afford to do.

Thank you to all who have worked hard to make our community successful. I hope you have had a good break over the holiday period.