

[Letter to Marks and Spencers](#)

I am following up my questions to you about the possible closure of the Wokingham store after hearing the views of more of my constituents.

There is a general feeling amongst those interested in the issue that we would like Marks and Spencer to stay in the town. The Town Centre as you know is currently undergoing a substantial redevelopment to make it a more attractive retail centre with more floorspace. Wokingham Borough is expanding with four major new sites for additional housing, including two nearby in Wokingham itself. New residents will need good shops. The Borough expects these changes to generate more footfall in Wokingham centre. The area around the Marketplace is a great setting for shopping, with a rich diversity of places to have a coffee or buy a meal. The Town actively promotes itself with a calendar of events designed to bring more people into the centre.

Your sales figures and market research will of course inform your judgements about the retail offer that would work best for your business. There does seem to be more direct competition on food than on some of your standard textile lines which might have a bearing on how best to trade your current unit.

I would be happy to help find a way to keep it open to serve future Wokingham customers.

[Postings to this site](#)

Some people are sending in far too many posts each day, and some are still sending in very long posts. This is an exceptionally busy time with Parliament trying to complete necessary business and people preparing for the election to come, so my time for moderating is reduced. I will have to delete more.

[The French election](#)

We all mourn the death of a policeman in Paris. I send my condolences to his family.

The untimely death shortened the political campaigning, but could not derail the election.

Last week-end French electors faced plenty of choice. The opinion polls held close to election day correctly predicted that voting intentions were very split, and many were still undecided. One of the most fascinating features of the polls was the collapse of support for the socialist party, the Labour party equivalent, and the difficulty for the Republican candidate, the Conservative equivalent, to catch up three others.

Whoever becomes President of France will not belong to either of the two traditional main parties. He or she did not gain more than one quarter of the votes on the first ballot. This means that the uncertainties created by such a wide open election will continue after we know who the President is. The Presidential election will be followed by an election to the Parliament. If the Parliament votes are more strongly for the more traditional parties the new President will have limited powers and have to get on with a Prime Minister who does not agree on some big matters.

Mr Macron is the front runner to win in round two. A former socialist party Minister, he is now a reborn self styled centrist with a movement, not a political party. He might face a Parliament to his right. There could be clashes on economic reform and security. Were Mrs Le Pen to prove the pollsters wrong and emerge as the overall winner, she would probably face a Parliament to her left, with an inbuilt majority to keep France in the Euro and the EU when she wishes to leave.

It is a fascinating commentary on modern France that two of the top four candidates were outsiders, and one was an insider dressed up as an outsider. The only pure political establishment candidate was damaged by his past use of public money to run his office. It implies that many French voters are unhappy with the terrorist attacks, the high unemployment, the lack of growth in living standards and the lack of control over their borders. Some voted for a more left wing alternative who wants to take back control and go for more socialism in one country. Some voted for the National front to leave the Euro and assert national borders. Some voted for the independent who promises to do politics differently without being too precise how.

If the French people fail to give a decisive mandate to a new President, and then fail to give their President a decent level of support in Parliament, the anger and anguish will continue.

[US tax cuts – saving Speaker Ryan](#)

I had the pleasure of hearing Speaker Ryan of the US House of Representatives when he was in London last week talking about the new Administration's strategy.

He came across as able, engaging, well informed and keen to get on with the job. He wore power well, and handled deftly the questions of those in the media and think tank world who wished to trip him up or drive wedges between the House and the President.

There was surprisingly little reporting of his remarks on the media. He was warm and positive about the US/UK relationship. He constantly stressed its special nature and its long history, joked about the time the UK burned the White House and made a clear offer of early progress on a US/UK trade deal just as soon as the UK was in a position to do so. Given all the comments we hear reported on possible complexities in confirming our current free trade arrangements with the EU in a new format, it was odd we did not hear a lot more about a likely free trade deal with our single largest overseas country market.

He explained in a response to my question that both House Republicans and the President are keen on tax reform and reduction. Both agree on the shape of the simplification and reduction of personal income taxes. The differences over reform and reduction of corporate income taxes he thought to be easy to overcome, as both want the same direction of travel. Healthcare reform has been given priority because the spending reductions it produces are helpful in working out the budget impact of the tax changes. However, if they cannot secure an early healthcare reform the tax reform can still proceed.

He repeated that Republicans understand the current mood of scepticism about political establishments. They understand they need to deliver on both healthcare reform and tax reductions to keep their promises and to speed the US recovery. Getting things through the Congress even when a party has a majority in both as the Republicans do is never easy. Speaker Ryan seems determined to achieve something before the year is out.

Happy St George's day

Today we celebrate England's day.

We remember our greatest dramatist and poet, William Shakespeare, who was born and died on or about this day.

I wish you all a happy April 23rd.