

August Newsletter from John Howell MP for Henley

August is usually a quieter month as many people take holiday. Parliament is in recess which means that the busy Westminster schedule comes to a halt. However, it is not a holiday for MPs, rather an opportunity to spend more time in the constituency and catch up with things. So far this month I have had a number of meetings across the constituency with various groups and individuals and have been able to attend events that the usual Parliamentary schedule does not enable me to do.

One of the things that I have been doing is meeting with local councillors at Parish Councils. I have a rolling programme of trying to meet with council representatives. This gives me the opportunity to listen to local concerns, the issues of everyday life in our villages. These are not necessarily issues which I can take up and have influence over as our councils at all levels have delegated power. However sometimes there are concerns that 'up the line' there are representations that I can make to help going forward. It is also the opportunity to say thank you to all those who sit on our local councils. Our councillors at parish level are volunteers who give up a huge amount of their time to work on local issues and make our communities the desirable places to live that they are.

Similarly, where invited, I spend time with steering groups of communities working on Neighbourhood Development Plans. The value of Neighbourhood Plans remains crucial despite a recent case decided by Planning Inspectors on the border between Henley and Shiplake. This was a case about whether SODC has a three year housing land supply and not about Neighbourhood Plans. This is a distinction which appears to have evaded some in Henley. These steering groups are groups of people volunteering and seeking to steer their community through a process which will shape its future. They mastermind consultations to learn the views of residents and work to pull it all together into a draft plan. The rules are clear in the requirement for consultation to ensure that these plans are indeed community plans and not the plans of a few. I very much appreciate the hard work that people put into Neighbourhood Planning and hope that everyone in their own communities will support this work where applicable.

In September, when the schools return, I will be starting a rolling programme of returning to each school in the constituency. There are over 50 state schools in the constituency and over time I have been to each of them meeting with teachers, governors and pupils as each school has determined. Governors are another group of volunteers to whom I am grateful for their work. Being a school governor can be demanding and requires training and much commitment. My thanks to everyone who volunteers for all that you do. I am always interested to meet and learn more about what is being done. I hope that all of our residents share my appreciation for your work.

If you would like to know more about my work in Westminster, on behalf of the Government and the Constituency please do look at my website which is regularly updated. The address is www.johnhowellmp.com I also produce a periodic electronic newsletter and briefings on specific issues. If you would like to subscribe to these please e mail me at: john.howell@oxfordshireconservatives.com