



This month I write having just returned from a week deliberating at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The Council of Europe was set up in 1949 and currently includes 47 member states, 28 of which are in the EU. It looks after the rule of law, human rights and democracy in Europe. The Parliamentary Assembly consists of 324 members of parliament from the member states. It elects the Secretary General, the Human Rights Commissioner and the judges to the European Court of Human Rights. It provides a democratic forum for debate, monitors elections and its committees play an important role in examining current issues.

You may wonder why an MP elected in the UK should go to speak at such an organisation. One of the responsibilities of Parliament is foreign affairs. Being active members of the assembly is part of our international obligations and it is important that we have a voice in this international forum. If we had paid more attention to this we might, for example, have avoided the replacement of Colonel Gaddafi by a hard-line regime rather than the friendly liberal democracy we all hoped for.

The Parliamentary Assembly meets four times a year. In this session I spoke on a number of subjects directly relevant to us. The first of these was the attitude of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to changing the rules on foreign aid to include the Caribbean islands so badly hit by the hurricanes. I won OECD support for this. I also took up the cudgels in the fight against Daesh, whose terrorist attacks we have suffered, to ensure a proper trial for their crimes against humanity. I participated in a debate on our support for Jordan which lies at the crossroads of Europe and the Middle East and questioned the President of Ukraine on whether there had been any inadvertent help from Ukraine to North Korea's missile programme. All of this contributes to our role in the world as a strong country with a clear vision. It contributes to our safe place in the world and to our position as a clear player on the international stage.

Closer to home, there have been many questions over the number of new homes projected to be required in our area in the forthcoming plan period. The Government has started a consultation on the methodology for the assessment of housing need. It follows from the work of an independent committee set up by Government on which I sat. Amongst other things, we argued for a Central Government methodology for Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs). The result of the proposed new methodology means that this district sees a reduction of over 200 houses per annum which in turn would see the all-important five year housing land supply restored in the district. If this goes through it will be for the district council to decide how it uses this new freedom. One thing it also makes clear is that no Council will simply have to take the unmet need of neighbouring authorities. Essentially being able to show that the district has a five year housing land supply means that planning in the district is once again led by the Local Plan rather than by developer speculation.

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](http://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](mailto:john.howell@oxfordshireconservatives.com)

You can also follow me on twitter @JHowellUK or on Facebook [www.facebook.com/JohnHowellOxfordshire](https://www.facebook.com/JohnHowellOxfordshire)

Further details of the work of Parliament is available on the parliament website at [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk). As always, I am interested to hear constituent's views on the proposals before the House.

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