

View from the House

Since my last column, Her Majesty the Queen, in her Jubilee year addressed both Houses of Parliament, the Commons summoned to the Lords, to outline the Government's legislative agenda for the next parliamentary session to 2013. The last session was a particularly long one - 2 years.

Given the economy is in a double dip recession, there should have been a greater focus on a plan for growth. But the Government has included provisions to make it easier for businesses to fire staff when unemployment is at its highest level in 17 years. In Walsall South, there are currently 4,432 unemployed claimants, the 35th highest of the 650 UK constituencies.

The Government also needs to do more to help families. There will be changes in Working Tax Credits which will remove £73 a week from 203,000 couples and 449,000 families with children at the same time as changing the top rate of tax which will cut taxes for the richest earners next year by £3bn.

In Social Care, the Government has only committed to publishing draft legislation. As a member of the Health Select Committee we have produced a report on Social Care. There needs to be an urgent debate on costs and integrated care. The Government must tell us their view on the Dilnot Commission's recommendations for capping care costs.

Locally, many residents in Pheasey contacted me to express their dismay that the phone mast was erected despite the Council having refused permission to do so. Anyone who has seen it can see it is so out of place. But the saga of the Phone Mast continues. It is disingenuous for two multinational companies Vodaphone and O2 to say they did not have notice of the refusal when the refusal decision was on the Council's website, it was sent in a letter albeit by 2nd class post and they were informed in a telephone call. I hope the Council will appeal the High Court's judgment decision and the Court of Appeal settles this point of law which affects other Councils.

I tabled an Early Day Motion in the last Parliament to call for the exclusion of alterations to listed places of worship from the standard rate of VAT. So I was delighted that the Government has backtracked and will provide £30 million a year extra money. This is in addition to £12 million already in the Grant Scheme for repairs.

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