

View from the House

Many of you wrote to me about the proposed sale of our forests. The Government wanted to sell the forests with a diminishing public ownership and a greater role for private and civil society partners. A number of charities, including the National Trust, the Woodland Trust and the RSPB raised serious concerns, and many people signed the national petition.

Some forests, such as in Cannock Chase were saved but rightly you wanted the long established right to visit any forests free of charge. In an opposition debate, the Labour motion to stop the sell off was defeated.

I am pleased that by Thursday 18th February, the Government decided not to pursue this policy in the face of your opposition.

I remain very concerned about the Government's proposals to change the NHS. So on 9th February I asked the Prime Minister if the NHS is safe in the Governments hands, or if the hands are in the safe of the NHS? There are huge concerns that are opening up the NHS to unfair commercial competition will result in a worse service for users but make big profits for private companies.

Moreover, the cost of this reorganisation of the Health Service was not put before the electorate. The proposed restructuring was not costed before or after the election. Estimates put this at £1.5 billion. What a waste.

Locally, I was pleased to join residents and users of Pleck Library to highlight the fact that several Walsall libraries were under threat of closure. This coincided with the Save the Libraries day of action. A few days later it was reported that all of Walsall's libraries will be safe for the next financial year. People of all ages, backgrounds and interests make use of the literature, computers and local information. I hope they will be safe for many more years to come.

I am having a battle with IPSA about communicating with constituents and keeping voters informed about my work for them in parliament. I can send out a newsletter by email, or people can read it on my website but I am not allowed to print it. Given that only about 60% of homes in Walsall South have internet access I think this is unreasonable, unfair and discriminatory. I consider this hampers my accountability to you. I hope they will reconsider these costs as they are wholly incurred in relation to my work as an MP.