

View from the House – 24 September 2012

For those of you who use Bescot Stadium Station, the news that the ticket office would close caused concern. I wrote to the Transport Minister and London Midland asking them to keep the station open. Ticket Offices are more than just a place to buy a ticket. They provide a friendly, knowledgeable service on other aspects of travel including purchasing a ticket. It is good for safety when people are travelling late. And for fans travelling to watch the Saddlers this is a vital resource.

Last week, the Transport Minister Norman Baker MP, wrote to me to say that he is requiring London Midland to keep Bescot Stadium Station Ticket Office open. I was delighted. But, regrettably, the Minister omitted to inform me that he is only requiring the ticket office to be open for 11 hours a week and that it will be closed from Tuesday to Thursday and on Sundays. This is not acceptable.

I have written to the Transport Minister, to seek urgent clarification regarding his decision relating to the ticket office opening hours at Bescot Stadium Station. I hope to receive clarification from the Minister soon and will be pressing for longer ticket office opening hours at Bescot Stadium Station.

Last week, I spoke in an adjournment debate on the Government's proposed reforms to planning policy. Several provisions of the Localism Act 2011 relating to planning policy have only come into force this year and the National Planning Policy Framework was published 6 months ago, and yet the Government wants to relax planning rules.

Some of the changes are very significant. These include creating more permitted development rights for householders to build larger extensions without planning permission; developers in certain circumstances can apply directly to the Planning Inspectorate for planning permission. Nothing has been put in place to deal with disputes between neighbours and no additional voice for constituents to raise their concerns.

Allowing Local Authorities to review Green Belt designation could have serious consequences in Walsall. The Green Belt is already limited and decisions such as that on the former Three Crowns Pub site and three Crowns School have already undermined its status. I am pleased some local authorities have already said they will refuse to use them. Planning permission already exists for 400,000 homes and could take the next 3 years to clear the backlog.

Congratulations to Ellie Simmonds. You did Walsall and the country proud.

Valerie Vaz MP

23 September 2012