

View From the House

This week's column comes to you from the Conference recess. These conferences are an important time for members of the political parties to make policy announcements. I hope by now everyone has noted that if the Labour Party forms a new Government that we will repeal the Bedroom Tax.

I continue to get constituents who find themselves at the wrong end of this tax. Some whose extra bedroom is not even big enough to fit in a single bed. Others who have a settled life but find themselves uprooted to pay the extra charge when they can't afford it.

The real problem is that not enough new social or private housing is being built and this has hit a new low under this government. This is why at the conference Ed Miliband has pledged that under a Labour government we will be building 200,000 homes a year by the end of the parliament – more than at any time in a generation.

It seems that the threat to the Gala Baths has been lifted. I raised this with the Leader of the Opposition Labour Group, Tim Oliver, who assured me when the Baths were under threat that the Gala Baths would not be closed had the Labour Group been in charge. The Council has now listened to our opposition and has resolved to spend £1 million on the refurbishment of the Baths.

Remember the brine pool at the Gala Baths is a gold nugget in Walsall, the only one in the region and well used by many of my constituents and many others for its health benefits – long may this continue.

My constituents and I are still battling with the Council on the use of the Three Crowns School. The Council's application for outline planning permission for the development of 8 homes on the site is wrong. The site is part of Walsall's very limited Green Belt. There are already sites with planning permission for housing available, including the Three Crowns pub site! It is hard to find reasons to justify this decision on planning grounds.

I am delighted that following a street meeting with Centro and National Express, Centro have agreed with Arriva to re-route the 327. Residents can still use it at the end of Stafford Road but don't have to endure a procession of buses down their narrow residential street. Some good news after a long campaign.

Valerie Vaz MP
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