

## **View from the House – 4 August 2014**

Many of you have contacted me about the terrible situation in Gaza, more than on any other issue. It was unacceptable for Israel to bomb a UN school. The loss of life of innocent people and particularly children should be condemned. The UN has rightly done so as a breach of international humanitarian law. There is no justification for the ongoing attacks and absurd to tell people to leave their homes when they have nowhere else to go. There must be international pressure for an immediate ceasefire. This is also a breach of international law.

When is a consultation not a consultation? On the last day of this Parliamentary term I spoke in the Adjournment Debate to draw attention to consultations by the Council.

At Stafford Road, Darlaston and Walstead Road, the Council decided to install speed humps on the roads following a consultation. However in both cases even though some residents did not or could not respond, the non-responses were counted as a response in favour of the scheme. For the residents living on the roads, the speed humps are causing disturbance and in some cases damage to their cars.

A quick check with other Councils, such as Stafford County Council and Sandwell, and they said they do not count non responses in favour. Bristol City Council has 7 principles for its consultations which could be more widely adopted. They suggest: "Time consultations well and allow sufficient time to respond; Offer genuine options and ask objective questions." It works in Bristol, it should be standard practise everywhere. Current guidance seems to deal with Government Department consultations only. During the debate I called for Government guidance for local authorities to be published.

I was surprised to hear from a constituent that HM Passport Office is asking some counter-signatories to an application to telephone an 0845 number. Also calls are sometimes not answered for up to an hour, incurring potentially significant costs to callers. Do let your counter-signatories know.

Some good news for a Walsall South constituent. I nominated Andy Brown for his voluntary work for the Aneurin Bevan Prize for Health and Wellbeing. He received a certificate. Andy has also received the Outstanding Citizen Award 2013/14 from The Mayor of Wolverhampton together with a cheque for £11,628.34p for the Black Country MS Society. This is recognition of the enormous effort Andy puts in to help other people. Well done Andy.

**Valerie Vaz MP**