

View from the House – 20 February 2014

I am pleased to report a few successes in Parliament. The most significant were the votes to ban smoking in cars when children are present and to ensure there is standardised packaging on tobacco products.

In another vote, Ian Lavery Labour MP, Wansbeck, introduced a Ten Minute Rule Bill to abolish the Bedroom Tax. It gets its second reading by 226 votes to 1. It was a good reminder of this iniquitous “tax” which is impacting profoundly on people.

A meeting of local residents who have a sufficient interest in the Planning application at Great Barr Park left me in no doubt that the enabling development should be refused on planning grounds. The developers want to build 59 large houses on the Green Belt. An enabling development allows a developer to raise funds to restore an historic building. It would not otherwise be commercially viable and would contradict Government planning policy. The building is Great Barr Hall.

Under the developers’ proposals the restoration of the Hall would not see it restored to its original condition. A number of compromises have been agreed with English Heritage for commercial reasons. All we would see at Great Barr Hall would be an approximate replica of the building that once stood on the site. English Heritage confirmed to me there is nothing of historical significance left.

My constituents and others with an interest, who were not properly consulted, oppose the development in the main because Green Belt land in Walsall is extremely limited. The Green Belt at Great Barr Park is particularly important because this undeveloped land creates the natural boundary between Walsall, Birmingham and Sandwell.

More building on the Green Belt is planned for the former Three Crowns School on Skip Lane. Despite a restriction on the Charges register, planning permission was granted for the development of 8 large houses on Green Belt land. But the report to the Planning Committee did not include all of the relevant considerations. These included the topography of the site, the impact on the skyline and the proposed houses will overlook nearby properties. The new planning policy is working against the Green belt and local people’s interests..

I celebrated National Libraries Day by reading “Where the Wild things Are” by Maurice Sendak to a very attentive group in Pleck Library. The Library was busy – long may all the Libraries continue with their excellent work and knowledgeable qualified staff.

Valerie Vaz MP

16 February 2014