

View from the House 4 Jan 2015

I wish you all a very Happy New Year 2016 and hope you had a peaceful Christmas.

One of the first campaigns unfortunately is a re-run of a previous campaign – to stop the closure of Pleck Library and keep the internationally iconic Walsall Art Gallery (WAG) open on Sundays. Both are under threat from cuts.

Whilst The Tory Government's funding for Councils is 24% less, making it hard for Councils to close their funding deficit, the current Tory administration at Walsall Council seems unaware of the importance of libraries as places of learning and social activity. And with the regeneration around WAG there needs to be a cultural balance to all the restaurants springing up in the area. Sundays are good days for a family visit. In my view there is no point in regenerating the area when the renowned collection is not seen.

Holding the Government to account may be difficult if the Government goes ahead and removes the Short money given to Opposition parties. Even Tory MPs are opposed to this move. It took the Opposition to reverse the policy of cuts in tax credits, u turns over secure colleges, the contract with Saudi Arabia, criminal legal aid and court fines enforcement which have so far cost £14.7million. The public are paying for this divided Government.

Following an Urgent Question the Government finally admitted that the new funding formula for the police budget was based on the wrong data. The West Midlands would have been worse off by £28.3 million. As a result of the reversal, no PCSOs in Walsall will be made redundant. A victory for community policing.

But on the day before we rose, having previously pledged an outright ban on fracking in national parks, the government forced and won a vote to allow fracking under national parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, World Heritage Sites, and Groundwater Protection Zones. It makes a nonsense of the Paris 2015 Climate Change agreement. I voted against.

I was saddened to hear that Bill Madeley MBE, Freeman of the Borough of Walsall sadly passed away. Bill known locally as "Mr Darlaston" was loyal, kind and supportive. He showed all those qualities to me personally after I became the candidate in 2010 and then MP. He improved the lives of so many people in Walsall. Condolences to his beloved Debbie and family– may he rest in peace.