

View from the House

In the House the Labour Party called an emergency debate on the steel crisis. Steel is a vital commodity and is the foundation of many of the UK's manufacturing sectors including aerospace, defence, automotive and construction.

The crisis will effect Walsall South and the West Midlands. Not only are there are 12,000 companies in the West Midlands connected with the steel industry but the industry as a whole contributes £9.6 billion to the UK economy.

When Tata Steel Europe announced that all its steel companies will be sold, this affected the site at All Saints Road, Darlaston with the possible loss of 60 jobs added to those 122 lost when Caparo Atlas Fastenings closed. These are skills we cannot afford to lose given the infrastructure projects scheduled such as HS2.

Before Easter, my colleague Stephen Kinnock MP who represents Port Talbot the Tata steel hub told the Prime Minister that he would be going to Mumbai to speak to Tata. There was no response by any Government Minister.

This is unacceptable because the Government knew about the dumping of cheap steel by the Chinese; they knew about the high energy costs for the industry and that investment in plant and machinery should have been exempted from business rates.

With the EU set to abolish the lesser duty rule which allows the imposition of a higher tariff on the dumping of cheap steel, the Government needs to agree rather than blocking this measure.

We could ensure that infrastructure projects are fast-tracked and that procurement contracts would allow the use of British Steel with a community benefit clause. This enables a contract to include specification of the development of local skills recruitment and reinvestment in communities with any procurement spending.

Also at risk is the Green Belt at Great Barr Hall. Sadly it is not being protected by the Tory controlled Council. A Site allocation document (SAD) published in September 2015 included "taking into account the Green Belt and agricultural land". But the SAD March 2016 states "it is recognized some enabling development will be required to protect the heritage asset". No it is not. It seems Walsall's Tory Council is bending over backwards to encourage property speculators to build on protected parkland and Green Belt. Do object to the loss of Green Belt and agricultural land by responding to the SAD before it is lost forever to a gated development.

Valerie Vaz MP

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