

# MP's Diary

News from John Howell MP for the Henley Constituency June 2011

I already produce a newsletter each month for parish magazines detailing what Parliament has been doing. However, I have been asked whether I can also produce a more personal note each month of the areas in which I have been personally involved. Hence this newsletter.



Henley MP meets President Obama

## Obama visit cements relationship

The visit of President Obama to parliament was the first time a US president had addressed both Houses of Parliament. As a member of the British-American Parliamentary Group I was pleased to hear the President speak about the history of the UK's relationship with the United States and our shared values in the face of major challenges around the world.

A small number of us were introduced by the Speaker to the President as he left Westminster Hall and had the chance to speak about a number of issues relating to UK-US relations.



John with the Rt Hon Greg Clark and a team of Planning Practitioners

## Decentralisation moves forward

The origin of many of the Government's radical changes to the planning system lie in my policy paper – Open Source Planning. The Localism Bill which gives these changes effect has now successfully completed its passage through the House of Commons and has moved on to the House of Lords.

The changes end the previous reliance on top-down targets to encourage growth and house building and provide opportunities for local people to help shape their neighbourhoods.

We are committed to a radical transfer of power away from government to people and communities. We believe decentralisation should go beyond just transferring powers from Whitehall to local councils and that there should be double devolution from councils down to people and communities. The Bill is expected to receive Royal Assent towards the end of the year. Commenting on my contribution to the Bill in his speech at Third Reading Greg Clark said "I thank my parliamentary private secretary, the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), whose seminal paper, "Open Source Planning", was the source of inspiration for many of the policies in the Bill."



John with the Rt Hon Sir George Young, Leader of the House

## A Year of Radical Reform

It is now a little over a year since the 2010 election. Already, this has proved to be a radical and reforming Government. We have now completed a quarter of the commitments made in our five-year Coalition Agreement and we are well on the way to completing two-thirds of the total. From the Emergency Budget and tough new spending plans, to the Bank Levy, the introduction of the Pupil Premium, bringing powers back to communities and local government, we are making the right decisions.

There is a lot more still to do. After years of Labour short-term opportunism we have to tackle the big issues which will make the difference over the long term. It's no use suffering all this pain only to see the same problems emerge again in the future. We have to get rid of the crippling budget deficit and the debt which obliges us to pay interest of over £120 million a day. We have reform of welfare, pensions, immigration, university fees and the NHS.

As the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Leader of the House, the Rt Hon Sir George Young Bt., I have had to help manage the ordering of Parliamentary business to allow our legislative programme to progress and to provide a sounding board for the Leader and backbenchers on these issues and others such as MPs' pay and allowances. The breadth of the role is reflected in the range of questions which are asked each week of the Leader of the House and which cover local, national and international issues.



John at symposium with Ahmadiyya Imam Masjid

## Issues of War and Peace

At a time of military activity in Afghanistan and the international operation in Libya it was more than appropriate to be asked to take part in a debate with a Muslim group about whether the Koran was a book of peace or war.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is a peace loving sect which believes in integration and participation in the country in which its members settle. Some of its members were killed and wounded in the 2010 Lahore mosque shootings because of these views. I was delighted to discuss a range of world issues and approaches with the Imam of the community's London mosque, Imam Masjid, in what proved to be a stimulating afternoon.

## Constituency Support

### Schools Visits

I set out to visit all the schools in the Constituency. Recent visits include Charlton-on-Otmoor Primary, Wheatley Primary and Sonning Common Primary. I have now visited almost 80% of the schools.



### Encouraging good neighbourliness

In a recent debate on Reading's bid for City status I was happy to support the bid in exchange for a Reading City being a better neighbour to South Oxfordshire than Reading Town has been.



### Promoting the nuclear fusion work at Culham

In an article for The House magazine on energy in the UK I was asked to comment on nuclear fusion and the research at Culham. Culham has a unique experience of fusion both from a scientific and an engineering point of view which I have been able to show-case for both Houses of Parliament.



### Opening the first 'Music in the Park' in Thame

I had the pleasure to help Thame celebrate one of its biggest hidden assets – Elms Park.



To find out more about John's work visit his website at [www.johnhowellmp.com](http://www.johnhowellmp.com)

If you would like more information about what the Conservative Party is doing locally please visit [www.oxfordshireconservatives.com](http://www.oxfordshireconservatives.com)

Promoted by Kevin Thorpe on behalf of John Howell MP both of 8 Gorwell, Watlington, Oxfordshire, OX49 5QE

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