



Firstly may I wish everyone a peaceful and prosperous 2012. I also want especially to thank all those who work hard in our communities and for the many charities and voluntary organisations which make our area a good place to live and work. It was a great pleasure to meet so many of you in 2011 and to share a little in the work you do. I hope to meet many more of you in the coming year.

Parliament in November & December 2011

In November the Localism Bill received Royal Assent and became the Localism Act. As this year progresses measures enshrined in this Act will be introduced and which will see some key changes to the powers given to local communities. Transition arrangements have yet to be announced and I will ensure that information gets to those who need it as it becomes available. During the year we will see two of the first Neighbourhood Plans to be permitted by the Localism Act completed in this constituency as one of our villages (Woodcote) and one of our towns (Thame) were awarded the opportunity to pilot the process as 'frontrunners'. These plans will for the first time be a legal part of the planning system and will allow local communities to help shape the places where they live.

As the year drew to a close there were a number of important Ministerial Statements made in the House which set out important areas of Government policy.

Annual Energy Statement. The coalition agreement stated that the Government would give an Annual Energy Statement to Parliament which would set out strategic energy policy and guide investment. On 23rd November the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change made the 2011 Statement. This was the second Annual Statement and the Energy Secretary also announced a consultation on secondary legislation to provide for the Government's green deal which will begin next autumn.

Chancellor's Autumn Statement. It is a legal requirement for the Government to publish a financial report on the state of the economy twice a year. In March in the Budget Statement the Chancellor sets out the state of the national finances, Government's proposals for changes to taxation and growth forecasts. The November 'Autumn Statement' provides the chancellor an opportunity to update MPs on the Office for Budget Responsibility's growth forecasts for the UK economy and the public finances.

Statement on the uprating of benefits and pensions. On 8th December the Minister of State for Work and Pensions, Steve Webb, made a statement to the House of Commons on the uprating of benefits and pensions for 2011-12. This offers some protecting for the vulnerable including the elderly, those who are disabled, have caring responsibilities or are unable to work through no fault of their own.

A personal reflection on the year ahead.

If we look to the year ahead the Government has made it clear that restoring the economy will be its priority. Keeping international confidence will keep interest rates low to keep mortgage costs and the cost of business loans down.

With so many major world issues unresolved, there can be little doubt that 2012 will, in many ways, see many of the same issues as we faced in 2011 continue to be in the news. At the centre of this will undoubtedly be the continuing crisis in the Eurozone.

Hopefully too we shall have some special opportunities to enjoy ourselves with the Olympics and the Queen's Jubilee. Whether you are sportingly inclined or not, the Olympics this year will be a major focus of attention and there will be many opportunities offered through tourism. The Queen's Jubilee too, as a key national celebration, will bring a chance to celebrate together the life and work of a monarch who has given so much to this country.

During this year I will continue to give a regular and factual report of the key activities in Parliament including legislation. In these I do not offer party political reflections but simply seek to explain the stated purpose or aim of the Government or others who propose legislation such as individual MPs. Constituents of all political persuasions may agree or disagree on whether those stated aims will be achieved or whether they are desirable. I welcome letters and emails from constituents on these and other parliamentary matters.

Also in 2012 I plan to undertake some additional 'Village Tours'. Last September I visited 80 of the smaller villages and hamlets in the constituency in 8 days. In the coming months I hope to visit some of those I was unable to visit then and if possible to return to others. Details will be published through local magazines and websites.

My website is regularly updated and offers more information on my work both in Westminster and in the constituency. If you would like to read more about my work please visit www.johnhowellmp.com