

Spring update 2009

News update from your local MP Steve Webb



Poole Court, Poole Court Drive, Yate BS37 5PP

Dear resident,

Welcome to this news update. This is a brief summary of some of the range of issues on which I have been campaigning on behalf of local people. Comments or feedback would be welcome if you wish either by e-mail to steve@stevewebb.org.uk or you can write to me at the address above.

With best wishes,

Steve Webb MP

Better train services for Yate

I am fighting to improve local train services. Commuters between Yate and Bristol often have to put up with overcrowding and cancellations and as Yate grows this will only get worse. CrossCountry trains have refused my requests to stop their services at Yate so I am lobbying First Great Western and the government to lay on more coaches. In the medium term I would like to see a new turnaround facility at Yate to allow for a more frequent service.

Fair deal for pensioners

In Parliament I shadow the Department for Work and Pensions and continue to campaign on pensions issues raised by local residents:

In January I highlighted the 'fantasy' interest rates used by the DWP to calculate how much interest people earn from their savings when they apply for pension credit. This was after receiving a letter from a local resident who wanted to know where she could get savings rates like these. With falling savings rates, the idea that people can get over 10% is absurd; the rules must be changed so that pensioners with savings are treated more fairly. My campaign was featured in the Daily Mail recently.

Massive housebuilding threatened

Plans to build 32,800 new houses in South Gloucestershire by 2026 are currently being considered by the government. Whilst most people accept the need for extra houses to meet local need, development on this scale threatens to cause gridlock on our roads and concrete over large swathes of countryside. The Government has

Campaigning against mass build at Westminster



received more than 35,000 objections to these plans. Last month I joined a group of MPs in a meeting with the housing minister to stress the strength of local opposition. We expect a verdict later this year.

I am still fighting to ensure that local women get the full state pension they are entitled to. If you are a woman born between April 1938 and October 1944 and not drawing a full pension, you may be entitled to a pension boost if you have gaps in your National Insurance record between 1996/97 and 2001/02 – do contact me if you fit this category.

I am also still working on a campaign on behalf of women in my constituency who paid the 'married woman's stamp' and who ended up with no pension.

Some 550,000 retirees are being penalised by the method used by the Department for Work and Pensions to work out the handout intended to up pensioners' income to at least £124 per week.

- The Daily Mail, 21st January 2009

Dispensing GPs

Many local residents contacted me about Government plans to change the rules which allow some GP surgeries to dispense prescriptions. In villages such as Charfield and Hawkesbury Upton without their own GP surgery, the current service offered by GPs and local shops is hugely valued. I am delighted to say that our campaign has been successful and the Government has now withdrawn their plans to change the rules.



With GP partners at the opening of the new improved Courtside Surgery at Yate

School Closures

A council review is currently threatening the future of either Kings Court or Rodford schools in Yate. Whilst most people accept that falling numbers of pupils means that we need to look again at the way we organise our schools, I am not convinced that simply closing schools is the way forward. This could be a golden opportunity to teach children in smaller classes and give them the additional support that is often not possible in a large class. I will be working with parents of children at both schools to see if a positive way forward can be found.

I have also undertaken a survey of all the South Glos. secondary and primary schools in my constituency to see how they are coping with the cost pressures caused by rising fuel bills; whilst some are protected by a three-year deal negotiated by the Council, others are faced with having to make cutbacks because of soaring energy costs; I am keen to support schools who want to improve their insulation and energy efficiency both to save themselves money and to benefit the environment.

Severn Barrage

The Government's investigation into harnessing the tidal power of the Severn has moved into its next phase. A shortlist of schemes to be given further consideration has been drawn up. These include three possible sites for a barrage – Cardiff-Weston, 'Shoots' (just south of the Second Severn Crossing) and 'Beachley' (just north of the old Severn Bridge) – and two possible tidal lagoons which would be attached to the shore – one at Bridgwater Bay and the other in South Wales. Whilst I welcome the work that is being done, I am concerned that some of the other options such as a tidal "reef" which might cause less environmental damage appear to have been ruled out. I will be making representations to the Department for Energy and Climate Change about this issue.

Crime

Although overall crime rates in South Gloucestershire are relatively low, local residents do contact me from time to time over particular concerns, especially relating to anti-social behaviour. In such cases I work closely not only with the Police but also with 'Safer South

Post Office Success

Hundreds of local people sent me campaign postcards calling for the Post Office to retain the contract for the 'post office card account'. The card allows people to collect their pensions and benefits via the post office. I wrote to the Prime Minister in support of the campaign and raised the issue in Parliament, and was delighted when the decision was taken to keep the contract with the Post Office. Without this, still more of our town and village post offices could have been under threat.



Steve speaks at a rally in support of Tytherington post office

Gloucestershire' who co-ordinate the different public bodies who can help to tackle the causes of a problem in a particular local area. If you would like more information, please do not hesitate to let me know.