



You will hear snippets of what goes on in Parliament in the news and this is inevitably limited. In my regular newsletter I try to give a factual report of the key things going through parliament. Where appropriate I also give a summary of the purpose or aim of a particular piece of legislation. These are not party political reflections simply the stated aim of the Bill. Constituents of all political persuasions may agree or disagree on different issues. I welcome letters and emails from constituents on these and other parliamentary matters.

Now that the clocks have changed the summer recess seems distant. It has been a fragmented period since the summer with just two weeks back in Westminster before the recess during which the various Party Conferences took place. At the time of writing we have again had just a few weeks back in Parliament. At this time of year the work of Parliament can feel similarly fragmented as there is tidying up of Bills to be done as each House makes its recommendations for amendments.

### **Bills and Debates in Parliament**

The Pensions Bill received Royal Assent in November, becoming the Pensions Act 2011. The Act equalises men and women's state pension ages to 65 by 2018 and accelerates the increase in state pension age to age 66 for both men and women by 2020. The Energy bill also received Royal Assent. Originally introduced in the House of Lords the energy Bill becomes The Energy Act 2011. The Act specifically includes key provisions on The Green Deal. The Armed Forces Bill, the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill and the Sovereign Grants Bill also reached Royal Assent.

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill finished its first stages in the House of Commons and passed to the Lords. The Bill seeks to redefine the scope of civil legal aid so that it is more focused, effective and sustainable; implement proposals to restore proportion to "no win, no fee" Conditional Fee Arrangements; and reform of sentencing legislation to ensure that offenders are properly punished and rehabilitated.

There were also some key debates including a moving debate relating to the disclosure and publication of the documents relating to the 1989 Hillsborough Disaster. One of the key debates was on the National Planning Policy Framework. Given the media attention on this it was good to have the chance for a debate

The Localism Bill completed all its Parliamentary stages and has now passed to Royal Assent to become an Act. The Bill introduces neighbourhood planning, abolishes Regional Spatial Strategies such as the South East Plan and provides a number of new rights for communities and their councils.

### **September Recess Village Tour**

Whilst the House was in recess I took the opportunity to undertake a 'Village Tour'. This was a new venture which entailed visiting 80 of the smaller villages and hamlets in the constituency. It was the biggest face-to-face engagement programme undertaken by any MP in this constituency. It was a whistle-stop tour during which I stopped for 10 or 15 minutes in each place and discussed whatever issues the people in that place wanted to raise. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet more constituents in places where there are not usually opportunities to do so. I was amazed at the range of issues on people's minds which showed the many different subjects of concern to constituents and indeed the many different views on some subjects. Some of the recurring topics were on planning, immigration and broadband.

Although this newsletter looks back at September and October the lead times of Parish Magazines are such that it will be December before this is published. I would therefore take this opportunity to wish all constituents a Happy Christmas and my good wishes for the New Year. May I also say thank you to all those who work hard in our communities to make them special for the rest of us. It is always a pleasure when I get the opportunity to visit community activities and I look forward to learning yet more about what is being done in 2012.

***More information on my work is available on my website [www.johnhowellmp.com](http://www.johnhowellmp.com)***