

ED VAIZEY WRITES...

At the beginning of April, the Daily Mail wrote a two-page spread on Wantage. The Daily Mail is now printed just a few miles away from Wantage, in Didcot, so you might have thought this would be a homage to a local, nearby town. Not a bit of it. Headed Credit Crunch Central, the article depicted Wantage as almost a ghost town - boarded up shops, listless kids, even the famous statue of King Alfred denuded of his axe.

The premise of this article was that the Wantage constituency, which I represent, and which includes Faringdon, Grove, Didcot and Wallingford as well as Wantage itself, has seen the largest annual rise in unemployment in the country, in percentage terms - a whopping 204.9%. Now, that is a very worrying statistic. And I do not want in any way to underestimate the difficulties we face in this area, nor the personal crisis faced by many individuals and their families who together make up that terrible statistic, some of whom were quoted in the article.

But it is also important to present the other side of the story. Wantage - the town and the constituency - is very far from being a ghost town. Yes, Wantage itself has lost its Woolies, and several estate agents and a bar have gone out of business. But there are also new employers coming to the area all the time, to Wantage and elsewhere in the constituency. In fact, Wantage's rise in unemployment looks awful only because we start from such a low base. Even today, unemployment remains relatively low, at 2.5%, and Wantage ranks 601st out of 659 constituencies in terms of unemployment (with one obviously being constituency with the highest number of unemployed).

As I never tire of telling people, this is one of the most economically dynamic areas of the country, with Europe's largest business park, and some of the biggest scientific investment in the UK, as well as good transport links to the rest of this country. We are well-placed to weather this recession.

But we cannot just sit back. I am planning job clinics in Wantage and Didcot. As I have said before, I am ready to help any individual or business in difficulty, either with banks or Government bureaucracy. And we must also plan for recovery. We'll continue to need the skills to sustain our economy, which means investment in our local schools and colleges. We'll continue to need good transport links, which means planning infrastructure properly. And yes, we will need more housing, in the right places, so that people can be confident that if they invest here there will be the people to employ. But we are not Credit Crunch Central, not now, and I don't think ever.

Locally, the closure of the shop and Post Office is obviously a big blow. This is not, however, as a result of the national Post Office closure programme, nor a result of the recession, as I understand it. I hope that a solution can be found.

ED VAIZEY, MP Wantage (Con)
MP'S SURGERY WITH ED VAIZEY

5.30-7.00pm, unless stated otherwise

8 May	Grove, Old Mill Hall, Old School Lane
29 May	Didcot, King Alfred Drive, Community Centre
12 June	Didcot, King Alfred Drive, Community Centre
Contact Ed Vaizey by	
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COUNTY COUNCILLORS' REPORT

This is my last report as County Councillor for Marcham, Garford, Cothill, Tubney and Frilford of this term of office. I will be standing again at the election on June 4th, so I might be back, if the voters decide it. The last four years have flown by, but have been eventful, and have given me the opportunity to work closely with some of the residents and other Councillors in my division. This has been both a challenge and a pleasure.

May 2009

I ran for office in 2005 because it seemed that Thames Water were going to have things all their own way over their proposed reservoir, and nobody seemed to be doing anything to challenge their position. Four years on, and Thames Water still want to build a reservoir in our area, but now they will need to work much harder and more closely with the local community than they first anticipated. This can only be welcome, as it is all of us in the Vale that will have to live with the construction and visitor numbers this project could bring when finished.

Marcham has been seeking a bypass for many years, and although this may still be some years away, it must still be a priority in future for any County Councillor for Marcham. The present government have not been generous to the South East on project funding for highways, indeed the present budget to Oxfordshire County Council has been cut by 10% over the next 3 years.

This state of affairs might change with a new government, and if Mr Cameron is our next Prime Minister, I would hope that a more sympathetic approach to improvements along the A415, including a Marcham bypass, will be forthcoming. The A415 should be viewed as a relief road to the A34, and should be a regional priority for upgrading in future.

Marcham has grown over the last 4 years, and the school has been under great pressure to find, not only the room for the Early Years unit, but also more classroom space for the increased number of children coming forwards for the reception year. The school is blessed equally with a forward thinking Headteacher and an active and go - getting Board of Governors. The new building work at Marcham school should enable the needed expansion of places, and point the way to further expansion in future. I am pleased to have been able to assist in securing funding from the County Council for the building works at Marcham school.

Finally, we were badly flooded on July 20th 2007, and ever since, I have worked with landowners, flood groups and Parish Councils, to ensure that watercourses and drains are cleared. There is much more to do, but I believe a good start has been made, and the River Ock catchment will be made to be less prone to regular flooding in future.

It has been a pleasure to represent this area on the County Council, I hope I can do the same for the next 4 years. Many Thanks

CLLR IAIN BROWN

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REPORT FROM GARD

The Committee are not sitting back, and we now wish to achieve the elimination of the Thames Water reservoir proposal from their 25 year plan. All our advice is that the reservoir is not going to be needed for at least 20 years, and when additional supplies are required for London there are far more appropriate ways of meeting demand which have not been fully considered or researched by either Thames Water or the Environment Agency (EA).

Our water resources consultant, Chris Binnie, has confirmed that there is no good reason for Thames Water to have failed to undertake full research into the Severn to Thames water transfer options, especially as some of these were initiated by the old Water Resources Board and the National Rivers Authority before water privatisation.

Our flooding expert, Dr Penning-Rowsell, has reinforced the viability of a smaller reservoir at Longdon Marsh in Gloucestershire which was ruled out by both Thames Water, with support from the EA, on flooding grounds.

We have circulated Chris Binnie's critique of Thames Water's revised plan and we hope that it will be used by responsible and unbiased people when advice is given to Mr Hilary Benn. If not, its contents will stand up against the Abingdon reservoir plan in 5 years time, or when the reservoir again rears its unpleasant head.

NICK THOMPSON