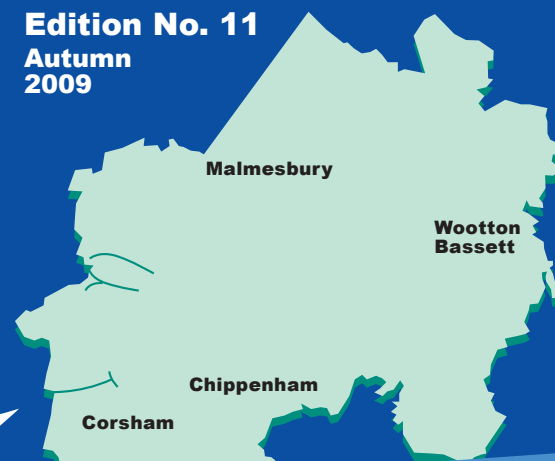




North Wiltshire

Voice

Edition No. 11
Autumn
2009



www.jamesgray.org

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HAVE YOUR SAY



The people of Wootton Bassett mark their respect

ON 12th March 2009, I tabled a Parliamentary motion (Early Day Motion) to the House of Commons drawing attention to the tributes paid to the armed forces by the people of Wootton Bassett and by the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Army, of which I am Chairman, and contrasting them with the demonstrations in Luton earlier in the year.

Not a week passes when we don't read in the paper that yet another member of our Armed Forces has been killed on active service. I cannot thank the people of Wootton Bassett enough for turning out week after week, whatever the weather, to pay their respects to those who have been killed in action.

Speaking to servicemen and women on a recent visit to Afghanistan, I know that they are highly appreciative of the honour which the town of Wootton Bassett pays to our service dead and the very informal and impromptu way in which it is done.

These wonderfully touching 'Repatriation' ceremonies in Wootton Bassett see the people of the town - and of neighbouring towns and villages - just paying their respects to men and women younger than many of our own children who have given their lives in pursuit of the orders

they have been so well trained to obey. There is no bitterness amongst the crowds, just a great sadness at the loss of these promising young lives. There are no orders, no generals, no Royals nor politicians (except mingling with the crowds).



No formalities, no pomposity, no Pomp and Circumstance March. Just the quiet solemnity of the tolling of the old bell of St Bartholomew's Church and the hush of the High Street.



Having paid their respects in their own simple way, after the cortege has passed, the people of Wootton Bassett quietly slip away to their homes and workplaces with their thoughts and their sadnesses.

Over recent months, in my role as Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Army, I have visited British troops serving in Afghanistan, based at Camp Bastion and Kandahar. I enjoyed meeting my constituents serving in Afghanistan, a large number coming from RAF Lyneham but also 42 and 45 Commando Royal Marines and 1st Battalion The Rifles, which incorporates Royal Gloucestershire Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment. In February I also welcomed 120 representatives of 7 Armoured Brigade who had recently returned from operations in Iraq to Parliament.



EDM 1075:

PUBLIC RECOGNITION OF THE ARMED SERVICES

12.03.2009

Gray, James

That this House applauds the people of Wootton Bassett for their selfless tributes to those who have given their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan; notes the widespread support for the welcome home ceremonies for returning British troops organised by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Army; and by contrast decries the demonstrations staged during the welcome-home parade in Luton.

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MP calls for the Camp Bastion War Memorial to be returned to Wootton Bassett

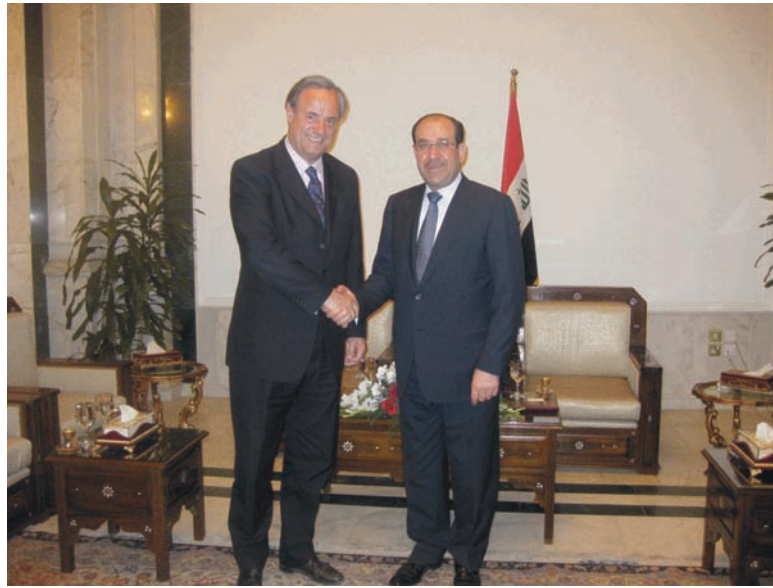


I HAVE called for the war memorial, which is currently at Camp Bastion to be moved to Wootton Bassett High Street when the camp finally closes, as a way of recognising the way the town pays its respects to the repatriated bodies of our fallen servicemen and women.

During a debate on the Armed Forces Veterans on 21st April, I said that there was a lot of talk of returning the magnificent memorial at Camp Bastion to the UK when the camp finally closes. The memorial consists of stones from the desert, topped with a cross made of spent cartridges from heavy machine guns. It is a superb war memorial, and there has been some discussion about where it might go in the UK. Given that it carries the names of those whose bodies have been carried through Wootton Bassett, the High Street might be a suitable location, in the long term. That might be a way of recognising the town's mark of respect.

I have also written to the Minister responsible for Veterans repeating this request.

James Gray visits Baghdad for talks with PM Al-Maliki



IN June of this year I spent two days in Baghdad as part of a Parliamentary visit to the Prime Minister and other Government departments.

Whatever one's view of the invasion of Iraq, it seems to me now that we must take steps to open political, diplomatic, commercial and cultural links with the people of Iraq and do what we can to help them 'normalise' their lives and international relations. This Parliamentary visit was part of that. I was somewhat dismayed by the continuing tight security situation, but glad to do my bit to help Iraq back to normality.

MP gets answers from ministers about boy racers

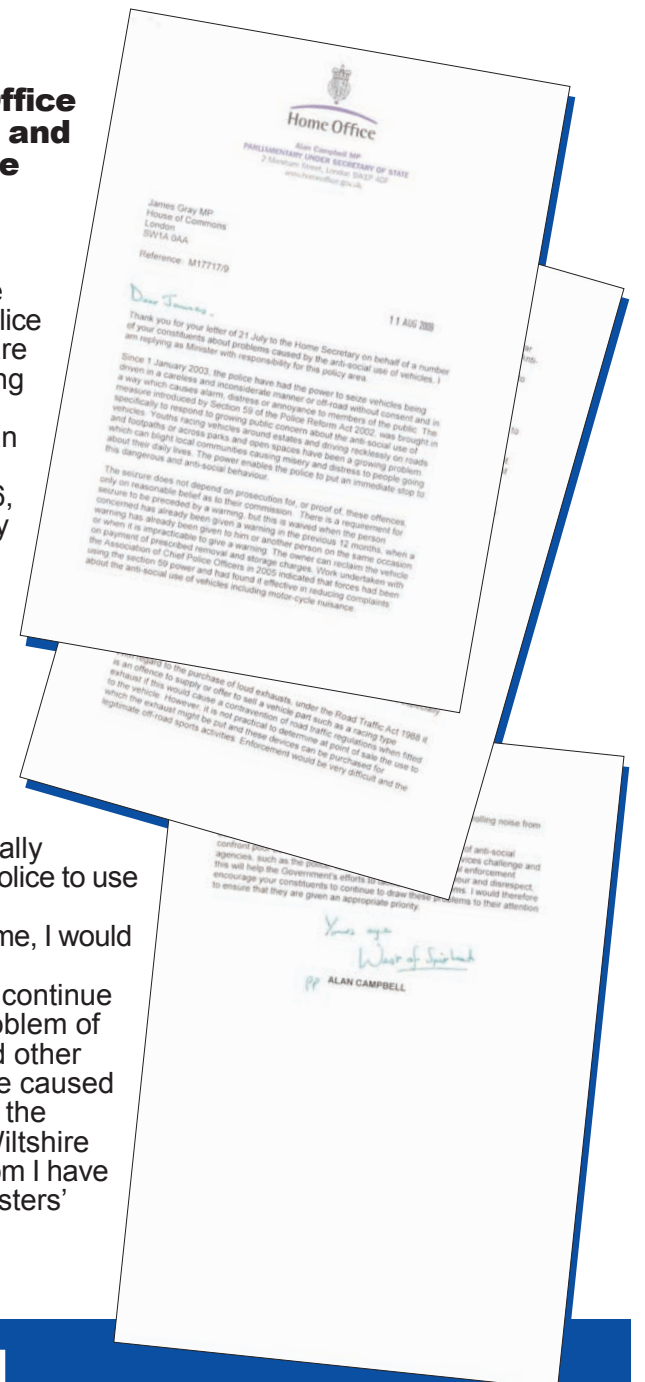
I HAVE welcomed the encouraging responses from Ministers at the Home Office and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in reply to a letter I wrote about vehicle noise nuisance and boy racers particularly affecting my constituents in Malmesbury.

I was especially pleased to see the Home Office Minister's comments about the powers which local Police and local authorities have to seize vehicles which are causing a nuisance, and to make byelaws prohibiting the use of vehicles in particular areas.

It was also good to see confirmed that altering an exhaust or silencer to increase noise is contrary to regulation 54 of the Road Vehicles Regulations 1986, and that the Police have powers to take action if they suspect that a vehicle is making excessive noise.

The Home Office's response also details some research that has been undertaken by the Department for Transport to establish whether a good test for measuring vehicle noise might be technically feasible for the Police to use in the future.

In the meantime, I would encourage my constituents to continue to draw the problem of boy racers and other noise nuisance caused by vehicles to the attention of Wiltshire Police, to whom I have sent the Ministers' letters.





MP insists more needs to be done to help the rural economy

I SPOKE of the difficulties facing the rural communities in the current recession in a debate I called in Westminster Hall on Tuesday 24th March 2009.

Although I am glad to say that the economy of my own North Wiltshire constituency is so far showing some signs of resilience, I believe that the time has come for the Government to start addressing the problems faced by our rural economies. I was therefore extremely pleased when I heard that my call for a debate on the 'Rural economy in the recession' had been successful.

The rural economy is home to around a million businesses, many of which are particularly susceptible to the recession, and are struggling as people tighten their purse strings. This, coupled with a lack of access to important services such as jobcentres and public transport, threatens to leave many in rural communities isolated and vulnerable.

Rural communities are the life blood of the countryside and I believe the time has come for them to start receiving the help they so desperately need.

In the debate, I pointed out that not only had the Faccenda factory in Sutton Benger and the St Ivel factory in Wootton Bassett closed, job losses had also been announced at Dolby Systems in Wootton Bassett and Hygrade meats in Chippenham.

Furthermore, Honda, one of the biggest employers in the area, completely shut down between the end of March and May. In the six months between June 2008 and January 2009 the number of people seeking the

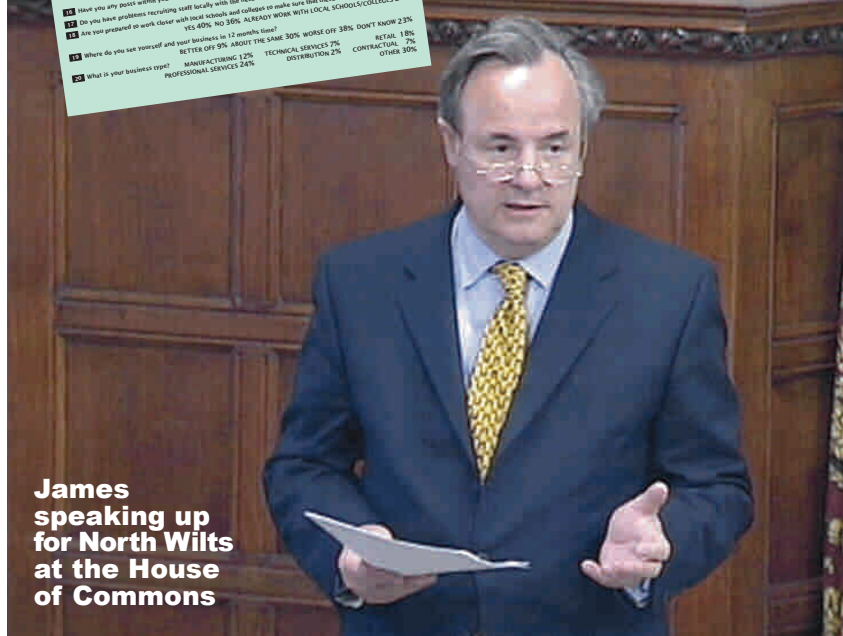
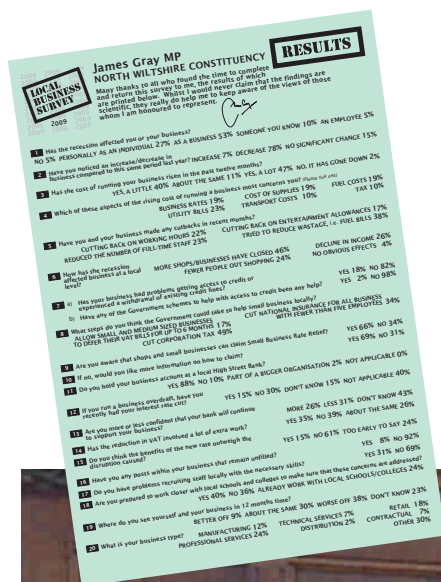
jobseeker's allowance had risen from just under 3,000 to just over 5,000.

Business confidence, which is crucial to the whole thing, has collapsed. This is something

which has come across strongly in the results of the survey I carried out earlier in the year. Although I would never claim it to be a wholly scientific survey, the results provided me with a very valuable insight into how many local businesses are faring in the current economic climate.

Only 5% of people who responded said they had not been affected in one way or another by the recession. Over 78% said that they had seen a decrease in business over the past 12 months and 38% felt they would be worse off in 12 months time. Most businesses had taken steps to make various cutbacks in recent months; the largest percentage being by trying to reduce wastage and reducing the number of full-time staff.

I am extremely grateful to everyone who took part in this exercise.



James speaking up for North Wilts at the House of Commons



RAF Lyneham to close

AFTER six years of campaigning and waiting in hope that the inevitable would not happen, the Government finally announced in May that RAF Lyneham is to close on 31st December 2012. However, it was not through official channels that I heard of the announcement, but via an internal letter from a Wing Commander at RAF Lyneham.

I was devastated to hear that despite all of our efforts, the base is to close on 31st December 2012. There are 750 civilians employed at RAF Lyneham and many hundreds of others in my constituency who owe their livelihoods in one way or another to the base and this news will come as a great blow to all of them, as well of course to the many thousands of RAF personnel who it will affect.

It had been hoped that the MOD would base the joint Helicopter Command at Lyneham, one of the options being discussed in Programme Belvedere, but this plan is to be abandoned as it is not economically viable.

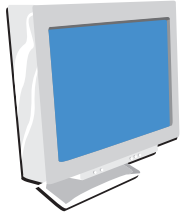
I have, however, pledged to continue the battle with the Government to try and find some means of reversing this decision, or otherwise to do everything I can to find a secure future for the base and the people who will be affected by its closure.



Parliamentary Questions from Hansard

House of Commons Written Answers. **27th April 2009**
RAF Lyneham
Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce his decision on the future of RAF Lyneham. [270371]
Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I expect to make an announcement shortly.

House of Commons Written Answers. **13th July 2009**
RAF Lyneham
Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his most recent estimate is of the cost to his Department of the closure of RAF Lyneham. [285548]
Bill Rammell: The closure of RAF Lyneham is currently estimated to have no net cost, since the costs of closing the station are anticipated to be more than offset by savings in future running costs.



My expenses available to download from the web

I have announced that my expenditure for the last four financial years is available to download from the web:

www.jamesgray.org/site/james-allowances.html

This follows on from three special surgeries on expenses which I held in three different locations within the Constituency, where I invited my Constituents to quiz me face-to-face on my own allowances and on the general question of how the system can be reformed.

If you missed one of my Special Surgeries on expenses on Saturday 23rd May and have any queries about my claims, please feel free to write to me at the House of Commons or email me at jamesgraymp@parliament.uk.

Subscribe to my weekly circular emails



A little while ago, I thought it might be helpful to compile an email list so that my constituents can receive weekly updates about my work on your behalf.

If you would like to be added to my email list, please provide your full name and email address below:

NAME

ADDRESS

EMAIL

WHEN COMPLETE, PLEASE POST TO:

James Gray MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Or email your name and email address to me at jamesgraymp@parliament.uk

Or sign up directly on my website at:

www.jamesgray.org

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JAMES GRAY'S NORTH WILTSHIRE Digital Communication Survey



As your Member of Parliament, I am keen to know the views of constituents on local issues. If you could spare a couple of minutes to complete this short survey on the issue of Digital Communication in North Wilts and return it to me, it would be much appreciated. It really is vital for me to know the views of those whom I am honoured to represent.

Thank you



JAMES GRAY MP

- 1 Do you use broadband at home? YES NO
- 2 Do you think that it is justifiable to charge more for broadband in rural and remote areas? YES NO
- 3 Has the internet changed the way you live?
YES, AS A BUSINESS YES, PERSONALLY NO
- 4 Do you think that the BBC TV licence fee is justifiable? YES NO
- 5 Were you aware that West TV region will switch over to digital television in March 2010? YES NO
- 6 Have you taken any steps to prepare for the switch over? YES NO
- 7 What is your main source of news?
NEWSPAPER INTERNET TV
Which one? Which site? Which channel?
- 8 Any comments?

Data Protection Act - The answers to this survey will be recorded for the sole use of James Gray MP and his team. The information you have provided will not be made available to any other person/organisation.

THANK YOU! WHEN COMPLETE, PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY TO:
James Gray MP (Digital Survey), House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

TITLE INITIALS SURNAME
Please use block capitals

ADDRESS

POSTCODE TELEPHONE

EMAIL

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NORTH WILTSHIRE PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

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By fax:
020 7219 1163

If you need help or advice, or perhaps if your group would be interested in a tour of Parliament, please contact James Gray.

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