



Catch up on my week!

Back in Westminster for the start of a new Parliament this week! A week largely focussed around school buildings, where I've been working to reassure residents and address the sensationalist headlines that have no doubt caused parents a great deal of unnecessary worry this week. All the info on that below...

I was on Politics Live to talk about a range of topics, including school buildings, but also flexible working and violence against shop workers. If you want to have a watch and hear/read more of my thoughts on these topics, click/tap [here](#) and [here](#)!

On Friday I was back in Mansfield as usual, talking to constituents and getting out and about around the area with a busy day ahead! [Watch my update here!](#)



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Watch: My speech in the Commons on school buildings

Councils, Academy Trusts and the DfE have been actively working on this issue of Aerated Concrete for several years. From a County Council perspective all of our schools and other buildings have been

surveyed, Academy Trusts have surveyed theirs and they deal with that directly with the DfE.

There is only one school in Nottinghamshire affected by last week's change in guidance, in Newark, and their return to school has been delayed for a few days as a result. Parents there are all aware and the school is communicating with them direct. All other schools have been cracking on as normal this week.

The County Council has recently approved school building improvement investment to the tune of some £9m+, Government regularly announces new rounds of school buildings improvement funding, and there are a load of Notts schools with recent commitments for major rebuilding work, including Meden, Garibaldi and All Saints in Mansfield.

In short, parents need not worry, despite the sensationalist headlines, and can rest assured that we've got it covered.

[Read the Council's statement here](#)

Throughout the week and throughout multiple sessions in the Commons and also on Politics Live, I've sought to reassure Mansfield and Nottinghamshire parents.

Don't listen to Labour's political rhetoric on this. Its nonsense. No Mansfield schools are closed (in fact only four of 22,000 schools nationally are closed). Every Mansfield child went back to school perfectly safely this week.

Please don't let politicians convince you that your kids cannot be happy and safe in school. Labour's narrative on this is highly irresponsible.

Find out what I've had to say on this below.

[I speak about this on Politics Live here](#)



Tour of Britain returns!

A packed house for the start of the Nottinghamshire stage of the The Tour Of Britain on Wednesday in Sherwood Forest!

Brilliant weather and an amazing atmosphere!



Watch the race get underway...



Highways work on Derby Road, outside West Notts College

Important to address some of the questions about the current Highways work on Derby Road, outside West Notts College, where there seems to be a bit of confusion and mis-reporting about what's going on. Hopefully the below is helpful.

I've had a lot of enquiries, and some suggestions that the roadworks there are all in the name of some really expensive cycle path. I can reassure residents that this is not the case.

This is a £2m improvement to the Highway, and a spot that residents consistently contact me to complain about. It's road and footway resurfacing, the introduction of new road safety measures and crossings, and signalling improvements at the junction.

Yes there is also a cycle path, and it's this element that has unlocked the funding for the rest of the work, because as I've described before, a good chunk of Highways funding is ring-fenced for 'active travel'. That's not within my gift to decide, it's a national ring-fencing and we don't have flexibility to decide differently.

However, what we are doing is using this funding to deliver road resurfacing, improvements and road safety measures alongside the active travel requirement. That way, we're able to try and ensure that ring-fenced active travel money is contributing to improving our roads as much as we're legally allowed. I know that this element, Highways improvements, is a big priority for many residents.

It's fair to say it's a long project, but also important to say that also the overall project is some 40+ weeks in total, the most disruptive bits including the temporary lights will last only a few weeks. Further phases of the work will not include this kind of traffic management. In short, the traffic impact will be just a handful of weeks only, not for 40-odd weeks. I appreciate that the signage on site is unclear about this, and I've taken that back to Via to try and improve it in future.

I do have to say that inevitably, where major road improvements and resurfacing is happening, there will be traffic management and some disruption. If people want roads to improve, which I think we all do, then inevitably Via will have to manage traffic in order to do that work, including temporary lights and occasional road closures. Without this, road improvements can't happen. So the inevitable consequence of road investment and improvements is more road works, I'm afraid.

So... long story short. We want to invest as much as we can in road improvements. In a perfect world, would I choose to spend money on cycle paths? No. I'd prioritise the roads. However, we don't live in a perfect system, and where ring-fencing requires the investment in

active travel, I will use that money to do as much wider work on road improvements as I possibly can.

This is not an expensive cycle path. This is a £2m road improvement project with resurfacing, new crossings and signalling improvements, where ring-fenced funding rules require that it must also have a cycle path. Without that cycling element we can't fund the resurfacing etc (and to be fair if you're having to do cycle routes, then connecting to the college is as good a place as any... students ride bikes). So as I've described before, it's a choice of all of that road improvement and resurfacing at a busy junction that residents have raised with me very often, including a cycle way, or to instead have no cycle-way and also no road improvements. I appreciate that's not a helpful system, but it is the national system.

Locally, we can't change these rules right now. However, I have been working on the long term answer to this, to get the flexibility we want. This is that from May 2024 we WILL have that flexibility to do this better and reprioritise that money. This is due to new plans to devolve this funding and these decisions down to the East Midlands rather than it happening in London. If I'm elected as the East Midlands Mayor next May, I will use the new powers and funds to invest heavily in road maintenance. That's the kind of new opportunity that devolution brings, and whilst none of it is perfect, and the system certainly isn't perfect, it presents a solution to some of these kinds of problems.

The local media is wrong on this. A cycle way is just a small (and required) part of a much bigger road improvement project, and the main disruption will be just a few short weeks, not 46. I hope that's reassuring and enlightening, even if I fully accept that the ring-fenced funding system is not helpful.



At the Stonebridge Lane development with David Wilson Homes

I've been on Asgard Avenue in Warsop meeting David Wilson Homes on the new Stonebridge Lane development, which is now around a year in. There's a mix here in different phases of affordable homes, mid-range and then more expensive 4/5 bed homes too.

I've been for a visit because this site, and the Site Manager Dave in particular, has recently won an NHBC 'Pride in the Job Award' as an exceptional site Manager who's looking after both the development and the residents. One resident even stopped me on the way around to tell me how great Dave is (and I don't think it was a set up!). That's really positive to hear obviously, as in some places and on some sites I know residents who have had a tough time, so that positive feedback here is great. Big congratulations to Dave!

We spoke about customer service in particular, and the experiences residents share with me of living in new build estates, which is not always great so again it was positive to hear that good feedback from residents here, as well as the award.

As an aside, on housing, I've been talking a lot recently about trying to find a better way to tackle planning of housing developments, and to do that on a more strategic way where we can look for the best places to deliver homes rather than every area just having to hit a target.

As we move towards having a regional Authority with new powers and funds in that kind of space; on strategic planning and regional development, I hope we can manage all of this more effectively for residents, communities and also developers too, to get more homes built in the right places, and most importantly with the right infrastructure in place! I know it's that infrastructure question that

often is top of residents' list of concerns, and we could definitely do it better with a more strategic overview of planning rather than everyone doing it in silos.



New Warsop Health Hub is going up!

The new Warsop Health Hub is appearing out of the ground on Carr Lane, after we secured money from the Government's Towns Fund to deliver new leisure facilities in Warsop. It should be good to go by next Summer. The leisure centre will have sports facilities, a cafe, pool, a gym and other health facilities. It's great to see spades in the ground and this set of Levelling Up funds coming through for us.



Yu Martial Arts and inspirational young people in Mansfield...

This is Olivia and Tom. They are 15 and 16, and I've just learned that they could absolutely beat me to death, if required 😊 Both martial arts world champions from Mansfield, and from the Yu Martial Arts Collective just off Sutton Road.

Honestly though, really enjoyed a showcase tonight with probably 20 amazing young people, demonstrating their commitment, their discipline and talent. Genuinely inspiring. A big thank you to Chris and all the coaches for inviting me along.

The club is growing really fast and after just a year they already boast this amazing facility and countless world champions in the club, but more than that - and I say this all the time right but that's because it's true - I'm always so impressed and inspired by what sport can do for young people, when they have that desire and that commitment. Its confidence, it's discipline, physical and mental health, it's full of so many life lessons.

Mansfield has so many amazing stories like that. Often hidden away in an old factory or working mens club, there are world champions, sporting success and inspirational young people absolutely grafting. It's amazing!

So yes, these guys are mega, this place is mega, and it makes me wish I was 15 again 😊 Have a look, the website is here: www.yumac.co.uk so why not go along, or take your kids, and get involved... and if not at Yu! or martial arts, then pick a sport! Any sport!

Cheers guys, loved it



New grant funding for heritage projects

"Historic England is announcing the second round of funding for Everyday Heritage Grants: Celebrating Working Class Histories.

These grants will fund community-led and people-focused projects to tell the stories of people and places missing from the records of history.

We will be inviting community and heritage organisations to apply for grants of up to £25,000, but we are also interested in funding smaller grass roots projects starting at £1,000 in the hope of reaching people we haven't worked with before.

Each project should enable people to share untold stories about the places where they live, encouraging communities to examine and tell

their own stories in their own ways.

The projects selected will contribute positively to participants' wellbeing, as well as providing innovative volunteering opportunities. Local heritage gives people a sense of pride in place and can act as a powerful catalyst for increasing local opportunities and prosperity."

Applications open on 7 September and close on 7 November 2023.

[Find out more here](#)



Free School meals for everyone?

Most families don't need free school meals, and the poorest children already get them. We've recently expanded eligibility to include more kids.

Yet, Sadiq will make you fund them for the kids of rich people too. Literally taxing the poor to give to the rich.

Bravo!

Oh to be a London taxpayer... City Hall isn't funding it, taxpayers are! There's no such thing as a free lunch!

Your feedback

Every so often I like to ask Mansfield constituents to share

matters!



a general sense of their thoughts and priorities, both in terms of local and national issues, and also on the politics of it all.

It only take two minutes to tell me what you think, and it helps me to make sure I'm on the right track.

Please take my survey here, and help me to do the best job that I can.

[Fill in the survey here](#)

SWITCH UP Fun day!

Come and join us for a fun filled day with lots of free fun activities!

Everyone welcome!



Date: 9th September 2023

Time: 11am - 5pm

Where:

Green Space on Barringer Road,
opposite Switch Up Community Hub,
(formerly River Maun Centre)
Mansfield, NG18 2DF

What's on?

Bouncy Castles!
Street Dance
Boxing
Free Refreshments
...and more!



For more information call 01623 626 353
or email info@switch-up.org.uk





Marking 1 year since the passing of Queen Elizabeth II

Her Majesty the Queen left us a year ago on Friday...

An incredible woman, mother to a nation, and one of the greatest leaders of modern times.

And finally, this week's column! ↓

Click below to read...

"Access to sport essential to delivering a world-class education system"

That's all for this week!

Thanks for reading and I hope you have a great weekend!

Ben

Follow me on social media



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