

Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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Saltwell Towers Restoration



When I was chair of Gateshead's Recreation Committee and later council leader, it often felt as though I was fighting a rearguard action against architects and planners keen to demolish Saltwell Towers. The restoration of this magnificent building, opened in July, is a tribute to all those who were determined to preserve and rejuvenate this well-loved landmark and to the Heritage Lottery Fund for funding the work.

Left, the restored building and right, the official opening



UNICEF Children's Lobby of Parliament



I met with youngsters from the Bensham area who were attending a Parliamentary lobby organised by UNICEF and NCH (previously the National Children's Home) to tell MPs how the newly-created Children's Commissioner should work and what powers there should be to protect children's rights.

Bensham Avenues Project



As the Home Office Minister was unable to meet community groups to talk about the White Paper 'Strength and Diversity', I met with youngsters in Gateshead to discuss the projects in which they had been involved

New Vicar for Scotswood



I was delighted to be able to welcome the newly appointed vicar to St Margaret's in Scotswood. The problems of Going for Growth have made this a troubled community and I was pleased to hear that the new vicar - Chris Knights - plans to get involved.

Lobley Hill and Bensham Branch



Its always a pleasure to join ward party meetings, to hear member's views and discuss local issues, and I hope to get round as many ward parties as I can in the coming months, Parliamentary commitments permitting.

NB: Bensham Social, always a good 'do', is at Gateshead Civic Centre on Friday 8 October

Comment



Parliament

Parliament rose for the summer recess without so much as a reshuffle in sight— unless you count the appointment of Peter Mandelson to a European Commissioner's job. This means a by-election in Hartlepool where local candidate **Ian Wright** would welcome Party members who want to help him retain the seat for Labour. (*Please contact my office or Labour North for details*) However, as the Tories also launched the summer recess with their traditional outbreak of infighting, serious opposition will probably come from other quarters.

There was good news too on the culture front with the announcement of the programme of events taking place under the auspices of the Gateshead Newcastle partnership. I met with Tessa Jowell in June to lobby for funding. I reminded her of the tremendous work that is going on here and the promises made that our disappointment at losing the prestigious Capital of Culture title would be compensated in this new round of culture spending. So I was delighted to hear her announce that the biggest share of funding will come to Tyneside.

July also marked Tony Blair's tenth anniversary as leader. But, with the publication of the Butler report into the inadequacies of the intelligence that supported the decision to go to war, it's been hard to recognise the milestones that Tony has achieved both as leader and as Prime Minister. And the truth is that the national debt is at its lowest since 1915, that we have the strongest economy in Europe, unemployment is at record lows, there is record capital investment in the NHS and our schools, as well as record per-pupil funding, and cuts in youth unemployment.

In the days leading up to the Parliamentary recess the North East got the go-ahead to hold a referendum on **regional government** on November 4, on an all-postal ballot without the troublesome 'witness statement' that cost 28,000 people in the North East their votes in the European Elections. For a number of reasons, including an anticipated negative report from the Electoral Commission on the postal-ballot experience, the referenda in the North West and Yorkshire have been postponed.

And, of course, We had Gordon Brown's fourth **spending review**. For all the compromises made by New Labour - and there have been some - one thing the Party has never lost is the desire to outwit the Tories, which is exactly what the Chancellor did in a speech designed to set the political agenda over the next 10 months or so. Education and health were the main winners but I was pleased to see an increase in the science budget, the expansion of nursery places for two year olds and funding to increase the number of Sure Start child centres from 1,700 to 2,500. And I was glad to see a 9% increase in the money going to international development, much of which will go to help the fight against Aids.

I was asked to lead a delegation of MPs to the Turks and Caicos islands, situated about 100 miles north of Cuba. This group of over 40 islands, only eight of which are inhabited, is a British Overseas Territory with a population of 20,000 but only 6,000 electors. That is because the immigrant population on the islands exceeds the 'belongers', as locals are referred to. There are all sorts of economic and political problems to struggle with and I think we contributed to a better understanding

of the UK position and how the community might progress towards their government's goal of good governance and full internal self-government.

July saw important statements on **Transport** that contained some reference to devolved powers that were reflected in the **Draft Regional Government Bill** which included proposed extensions of powers and responsibilities to Regional Assemblies contained in the earlier White Paper. There was discussion on Lords amendments to the **Traffic Management Bill**.



CONSTITUENCY

I raised the question of **cuts in local bus services** in the Commons and have had discussions with local councillors and the PTE on the subject.

I attended a 'Citizenship' ceremony in Gateshead to welcome new British citizens to our community.



at the Music Centre with local councillors. I never fail to be impressed by the quality of the building and the work in progress.



I have attended various events in support of the NEsaysYES (to regional government) campaign.