

Mid Norfolk WESTMINSTER Report

Spring 2009

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Constituency



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Keep Norfolk Local

DEMANDS KEITH SIMPSON

LOCAL MP Keith Simpson has once again raised his concerns over the Government's plans to abolish Broadland and Breckland Councils and to replace them with a single Unitary Authority (Council). Mr Simpson secured a special debate on the issue on February 24th, in Westminster Hall in Parliament. During the debate, Mr Simpson made clear his delight that any final decision had now been put back and was unlikely to be made until after the next General Election.



Opening the special debate Mr Simpson said, "This is the third debate that I have initiated on this issue... I asked for this debate largely as a consequence of the legal challenges that different local authorities have made, and of the Secretary of State's decision to extend the deadline for advice to 15th July, 2009. "I find it amazing, at this stage, that both the boundary committee and the Secretary of State have conceded that the committee misdirected itself in restricting the publication of its draft proposals to a single scheme, last July, thus making the process unlawful. The boundary committee said that it would have published proposals on more than one scheme if it had thought that it could. With the best will in the world, although colleagues may disagree on whether the

principle of having unitary authorities in their county areas is good, that kind of mistake, at procedural and administrative level, is totally unacceptable. Either the boundary committee will have to go back to square one and reconsider all the evidence, or, as I shall reiterate at the end of my speech, the Minister should, with some grace, drop the whole proposal as it is... flawed. "My approach to this issue has been to consider whether any reorganisation of local government in Norfolk from the current status quo will provide better services and better value for money to my constituents. From the beginning, I have never been convinced that any of the options would do that, but I accept that other colleagues take a different view on different options. From the

start of the process....

"For me, the two main issues are, first, whether unitary authorities would, in principle, be good for my constituents in Norfolk, and, secondly, how legitimate and efficient the process followed by the boundary committee... has been.... in the past two and a half years I have not received one letter, e-mail or phone call from, or had one face-to-face conversation with, any constituent who is in favour of anything other than the status quo. Indeed, if anything, people have written vociferously to oppose all the options that the boundary committee has proposed. All the parish councils in the Broadland district council area have opposed the proposals.....

"Big business tends to be in favour of the proposals, but most small businesses tend to be against them.... The right hon. Gentleman mentioned cost savings. The problem is that there is no agreed set of criteria by which to judge what savings have been made. That issue needs to be revisited given the economic downturn and the enormous economic pressures on all the councils in all the relevant areas. I suspect that the Treasury will not look favourably on any reorganisation that will cost money....

"Local opinion in Norfolk... has become cynical about reorganisations. We have had experience not just of the appalling process of reorganisation of local government, but of the reorganisation of the primary care trusts - we went to six and now we are back to one - and the attempts, which the right hon. Member for Norwich, South supported, to reorganise the police in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, which was greatcoats on, greatcoats off. My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon), the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and I



have attempted to achieve democratic accountability through the Broads authority, and that has failed. So, local opinion is incredibly cynical about these outcomes.

THE PROCESS

"Having passed briefly over some of the principal aspects of whether unitary authorities are a good idea, I now want to look at the process itself... The committee's process began in summer 2007 before it received any ministerial instructions: it was found that it was attempting to force local authorities into coming up with options before any instructions were received. The committee informed us at the time that cross-county proposals would not be considered and were not on the agenda, but in December 2007 ministerial instructions said that they would be. The committee had also said that it was unlikely that it would consider unitary authorities covering more than 500,000 people. Of course, as we know, the first unitary authority to be considered in respect of Norfolk and Suffolk would probably have had a population of between 750,000 and 800,000.

"The boundary committee told Members of Parliament and peers that it would cost only those proposals that emerged from an initial sift. No other area that I can think of, either in the private or public sector, would do that. It is rather like the Ministry of Defence having bids for the procurement of a piece of equipment and deciding only

to cost them after an initial sift. I find that absolutely incredible.

"In July 2008 the boundary committee published its proposals: a single unitary for Norfolk, including Lowestoft, with two alternative patterns; a two-authority pattern for Suffolk; My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and the right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) were forthright in their views on those proposals. Later, we discovered under a freedom of information request that the boundary committee's own experts had proposed an east-west divide as the favoured unitary authority for Norfolk. Why was that advice ignored? Why have experts if they are going to be overruled? Perhaps the boundary committee, or the Minister, could tell me the criteria by which it overruled its own experts. That does not give us confidence in the process.

"I suspect that the proposals for all three areas satisfied no majority of local opinion and, if anything, enraged it. Norfolk district councils went to the High Court to challenge the basis for the boundary committee's proposals and, as a

consequence of a judgment, the deadline for advice was extended from December 2008 to February 2009. Now the Secretary of State has further extended that deadline to 15th July, 2009. We were told from the beginning that... we had to rush and decisions had to be made very quickly indeed. However, I understand, from a judgment in court last week, that the judge said that there appeared to be no deadline and that it could be extended to 2011 or 2012. Once again, there appears to be a muddle about the process.

"It is unlikely that the Secretary of State will be introducing any orders in Parliament until the new year of 2010 or, if those are passed, bringing any unitary authorities into being in Norfolk, Suffolk and Devon until May 2010 - and by then there is likely to be a general election. I suggest that the Minister either goes back to the drawing board, given the failure to reach any agreed solution to the options on the table and given that the process is... flawed, or, even better, that he scraps this... process, which has had relatively limited support within the county structures..."

This is an edited version of Mr Simpson's speech.



Keith Simpson MP, presenting Eileen Freeman, 85, her Land Army medal at Broadlands Park Care Home, Upton, for her services to the Land Army during World War II.

Photograph: Eastern Daily Press

Keith Simpson MP - working for Mid Norfolk all year round



Keith's work as an MP

KEITH spends three days a week in the constituency; from Thursday evening until Monday morning he is in the constituency catching up on the week's important events, visiting schools, businesses, organisations and councillors and talking to his constituents at his regular advice surgeries.

The rest of the week Keith is at Westminster, representing the people of the Mid Norfolk constituency. On a normal day, he arrives at 8.00 am and has various meetings relating to business at Westminster and the constituency. The rest of his time is spent preparing for business in the House of Commons and for work in committees. Since May 2005, Keith has served as Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs.

How can Keith help me?

- **As well as voting on legislation in the House of Commons, Keith deals with a whole host of constituency issues. MPs deal with their own constituents allowing everyone the same access, whatever their political persuasion.**
- **Keith will always listen to your views and try to help you with any problems you may have. He is best able to help in cases where Parliament or central government is responsible, such as tax problems, pensions and benefits, immigration, etc. An MP cannot offer legal advice in a specific case.**
- **Keith can also ensure that constituency matters are raised in the House of Commons, and lobby Government Ministers on constituency matters.**
- **Constituents should understand that there are limits to what Keith can do - there is no magic wand. For your grievance to be redressed, a change in the law may be required. This is not something that an individual MP can guarantee to deliver.**

Post Office card account saved!

LOCAL MP, Keith Simpson, has welcomed the news that, after a hard, team-fought campaign, the Government have decided to award the new contract for the Post Office card account directly to Post Office Ltd.

As a result the four million people who choose to access their benefits at the Post Office each week can continue to do so. Without the Post Office card account, a further 3,000 post offices would have been forced to close.

Keith said, "This is a remarkable triumph for the campaign by the National Federation of Sub Postmasters, Post Office card account users and dedicated MPs. I am very pleased that this team effort has achieved such a clear result."



CAMPAIGN SUCCESS

Rural broadband

KEITH Simpson MP, has welcomed the government's commitment to increase broadband cover to all UK homes, and to make download speeds faster by 2012. This comes after months of campaigning to improve the rural broadband connection in the Mid Norfolk constituency.

Keith said, "Whilst the country has almost 100 per cent coverage, a significant number of UK households still suffer from an unreliable connection and poor connection speeds. Poorly served households tend to be in rural areas, where many share an exchange, and are further away from it. A digital

divide is developing, and there is a broadband divide between urban areas which have a much faster service, and rural areas. If there are to be rural jobs and if companies are to prosper in rural areas, broadband is vital because it is essential to the operation of a business".

Whilst the news is

encouraging, Keith will continue to press the government to ensure that this plea goes further than just a report, and that a strategy to extend rural broadband cover is put into place.



Keith Simpson MP at the New Technology Road Show

Keith Simpson MP - working for Mid Norfolk all year round

GP Dispensaries - another successful campaign

MID Norfolk MP, Keith Simpson, has been campaigning against Government proposals to restrict access to GP dispensaries, arguing that they provide a vital service in his constituency.

Keith said, "I am delighted that as a result of public pressure in Mid Norfolk and elsewhere the government have changed their minds on this matter; GPs will be allowed to continue to dispense medicines under the present arrangements.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved for great team effort that contributed to the government's decision to back down".



Keith is pictured with Practice Manager Mike Hammond (to the left of Keith) and other members of Hoveton and Wroxham Medical Practice



Keith Simpson MP, with NATO Secretary-General Mr Jaap de Hoop Scheffer (centre) at NATO HQ Brussels on 23rd January, 2008. Keith was a member of a parliamentary group visiting NATO HQ to discuss the situation in Afghanistan where some of his constituents have been serving in the armed forces.

How does Parliament work?

There is a website run by Parliament itself which provides a full range of information about the workings of Parliament, together with search engines that allow you to look up any topic or speech made by an MP. You can find the website at:

www.parliament.uk

The Parliamentary Education Unit also runs an excellent website for children and students at:

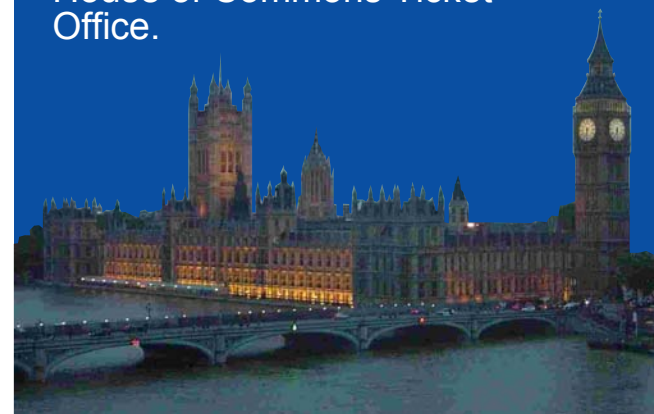
www.explore.parliament.uk

Fancy a trip to Parliament?

IF YOU would like to visit Parliament for a tour or to listen to a debate, please contact Keith's Westminster office on 020 7219 4053.

Full tours of Parliament only take place when the house is not sitting, which is on Monday mornings until midday and on Friday afternoons. Partial tours, which do not include areas used by MPs and Lords, are available for the rest of the week.

When Parliament is in recess, tour arrangements are different. During August, most tours cannot be booked through an MP, and tickets must be brought from the House of Commons Ticket Office.



MP linked to the web

Determined to use every avenue open to him to keep his constituents informed of his work on their behalf, Keith regularly updates his own website. The site can be found at:

www.keithsimpson.com

Commenting, Keith said, "Visitors to the site can access speeches, press releases, photographs and specific issues on which I have concentrated my time. I hope you will find this tool of use."

Keith Simpson MP - working for Mid Norfolk all year round

Mid Norfolk CONSTITUENCY 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 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 
Keith Simpson



- 1 Do you think that the level of policing in your village/town is adequate to meet the community's needs? (1 - Good, 3 - Adequate, 5 - Poor) 1 2 3 4 5
- 2 Do you expect that some new housing development is inevitable in your area? YES NO
- 3 Do you think that the amount currently proposed is: TOO GREAT? TOO SMALL? ABOUT RIGHT?
- 4 Do you use broadband at home? YES NO
 ■ If yes, are you satisfied with its speed and reliability? YES NO
 ■ Who is your supplier?
- 5 Have you had difficulty getting your children into a school of your choice? YES NO NOT RELEVANT
- 6 Have you or your family had any difficulty registering with an NHS dentist? YES NO I HAVEN'T TRIED
- 7 Do you attend local farmers' markets? YES NO
- 8 Would you value greater access to local produce? YES NO
- 9 How do you rate the quality of the environment (e.g. litter, cleanliness/repair of pavements, etc.) in your village/town? (1 - Excellent, 3 - Adequate, 5 - Bad) 1 2 3 4 5

10 What do you consider to be the three main priorities for improving the quality of life in your area?

ONE

TWO

THREE

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

WHEN COMPLETE, PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY TO:
Keith Simpson MP (Local Survey), House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

TITLE..... INITIALS..... SURNAME.....
Please use block capitals

ADDRESS

POSTCODE..... TELEPHONE.....

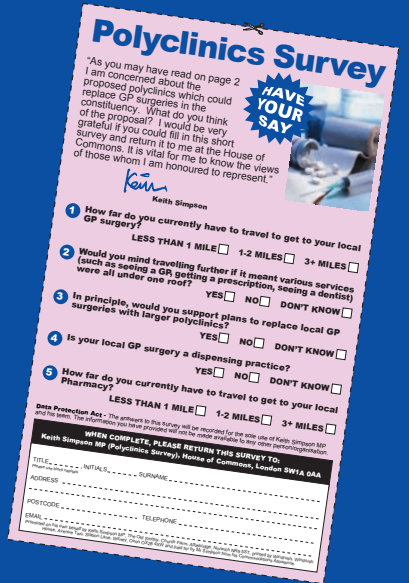
EMAIL

Promoted on his own behalf by Keith Simpson MP, The Old Smithy, Church Farm, Attlebridge, Norwich NR9 5ST, printed by Windrush, Windrush House, Avenue Two, Station Lane, Witney, Oxon OX28 4XW and paid for by Mr Simpson from his Communications Allowance.

Listening to you...

THANK YOU to all the local people who took the opportunity to tell Keith their views on the proposed polyclinics which could replace GP surgeries in the constituency by filling in the survey that appeared in his last Westminster Report.

There was an overwhelming opposition to the introduction of polyclinics. Over two thirds said that they would mind travelling further, even if it meant getting various services all under one roof. A convincing 96% said that they do not, in principle support plans to replace local GP surgeries with larger polyclinics. 85% were patients of a dispensing practise, with half those that responded having to travel less than a mile to their local pharmacy. Keith said, "My sincere thanks to all those who took the time and trouble to respond to my polyclinics survey; it really is very useful to hear the views of Mid Norfolk residents on local issues. I am pleased to see that so many of you share my concerns about the proposed polyclinics, and will do my best to avoid them being implemented."



There is another chance to voice YOUR opinions by filling in the constituency survey on the left.

MID NORFOLK PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

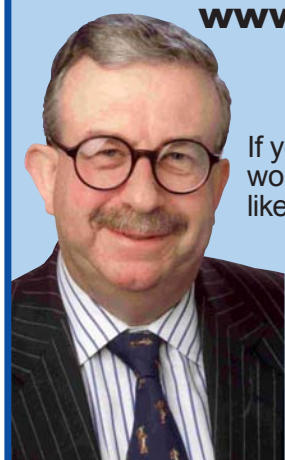
If you need help or advice, contact your Member of Parliament

Keith Simpson

at:
House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1A 0AA
Tel: (020) 7219 4053

or: **The Old Smithy, Church Farm, Attlebridge, Norwich NR9 5ST**
Tel: (01603) 865763

www.keithsimpson.com



If your group, organisation, business or school would like a visit from Keith Simpson or would like to visit the House of Commons, then please get in touch. He would be pleased to hear from you. Surgeries are held regularly. To book an appointment just contact his office on:

(01603) 865763