



# Westminster Report

from **Caroline Spelman, MP for Meriden constituency**

Spring 2004

[www.carolinespelman.com](http://www.carolinespelman.com)



# NEW RUNWAY PLANS: 'IT'S PLANE MADNESS'

**Local MP Caroline Spelman slams Government plans for a new runway to be built at Birmingham Airport.**



It has been over two years since the Government announced proposals for a second runway at Birmingham International Airport. In December 2003 the Government finally announced that it accepted the airport's counter proposal for a second runway, but this is still causing some concern.

Caroline Spelman has been following developments in the story from the beginning: "Once again the Government, while paying lip service to the idea of local consultation, has given the firm impression that they have already made up their minds almost before the ink of the first local protest had dried on the page. I am not generally a cynic, but the only conclusion I can come to is that despite local opposition they have always been deter-

mined to build a second runway at Birmingham.

"I am not convinced about the need for a second runway at Birmingham Airport. Gatwick handles 30 million passengers with one runway. Birmingham handled only just over 8 million last year. It stands to reason there must be room to expand with a single runway."

"It is another piecemeal transport decision. How is the West Coast Mainline going to cope with the projected 44 million passengers using Birmingham Airport? How are the local roads and motorway network going to cope? The White Paper says that the airport operators must pay for improved surface access. Because Birmingham Airport is partly owned

by our local authority it will mean council tax payers will be liable for some of the bill.

"There is no primary legislation requiring airport operators to pay compensation other than for those properties which fall within the footprint of the airport plans so the problem of blight will continue for those in the vicinity of the proposed developments.

"I am reminded of a similar process put in place in the early nineties for properties affected by the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. The lesson from that is that it is entirely up to the operator what compensation is given and there is no statutory obligation on the airport to compensate for general blight".

**W**elcome to the Spring 2004 Westminster Report. I hope you'll agree with me that this paper is a good way of keeping in touch with you about what is happening both locally and at Westminster.

The political scene has shifted with the election of a new leader of the Conservative Party, Michael Howard. I have a new job as Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment. Now instead of concentrating on the problems of the developing world, I am addressing issues closer to home but with wider implications. From global warming to local rubbish collections, the environment affects us all and what's positive is that we can all do something to make things better for the future.

I have been reflecting on some of the issues that we have faced in the Meriden constituency. The proposed expansion of Birmingham Airport is still a hot subject. However, after the threat of closure at Solihull A&E, I'm pleased to see that work has begun on a new medical assessment unit which will support the existing A&E department.

**Planning and particularly windfall development remains a big local issue; Redevelopment plans for the regeneration of Chelmsley Wood town centre have been announced; the national problem of post office closures has hit home in Castle Bromwich where the village post office has been closed - and now the Dorridge post office is under threat.**

**The big issues at Westminster have been Iraq and the Government's plans to introduce top-up fees for higher education.**

These are just some of the issues both locally and at Westminster that I will be keeping an eye on.

*Caroline Spelman*

**INSIDE**

**Caroline wages war on waste**

PAGE 2

**INSIDE**

**MP speaks out against more speed traps**

PAGE 3

**INSIDE**

**How to contact your MP**

PAGE 4

## What does an Ombudsman actually do?

### Caroline Spelman MP explains:

I am often asked to refer a complaint to an Ombudsman. Ombudsmen deal with complaints made by the public against government departments, financial institutions and other agencies. Complaints can usually be referred to the relevant Ombudsman after the internal complaints procedure of an organisation has been exhausted.

#### Parliamentary and Health Ombudsman

[www.ombudsman.org.uk/](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/)  
Tel. 0845 015 4033

The Health Service Ombudsman looks into complaints made by or on behalf of people who have suffered because of unsatisfactory treatment or service by the National Health Service (NHS). She is completely independent of the NHS and the government. Her services are free. The Ombudsman also looks into complaints against private health providers, but only if the treatment was funded by the NHS. She can also investigate complaints about other services provided on behalf of the NHS.

Parliamentary Ombudsman deals with complaints from members of the public that they have suffered injustice because of maladministration, faulty procedures or failing to follow correct procedures on the part of government departments or agencies e.g. Child Support Agency, Customs and Excise

#### Local Government Ombudsman

[www.lgo.org.uk/](http://www.lgo.org.uk/)  
Tel. 0845 602 1983

The Local Government Ombudsmen investigate complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by local authorities and certain other bodies.

#### Financial Services Ombudsman

[www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk/](http://www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk/)  
Tel. 0845 080 1800

Set up to give consumers a free, independent service for resolving disputes with financial firms e.g. banks, building societies, financial advisers, insurance companies. They can also deal with most financial complaints about endowment policies, mortgages, credit cards, unit trusts, personal pension plans etc.

#### The Pensions Ombudsman

[www.pensions-ombudsman.org.uk/](http://www.pensions-ombudsman.org.uk/)  
020 7834 9144

The Pensions Ombudsman investigates and decides complaints and disputes about the way that pension schemes are run.

#### The Independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme

[www.ihos.org.uk/](http://www.ihos.org.uk/)  
0845 7125 973

The Independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme deals with disputes between landlords and tenants in England.

#### Legal Services Ombudsman

<http://www.olso.org/>  
Tel. 0845 601 0794

If you make a complaint about a member of the legal profession, the Ombudsman can investigate only after it has gone through the complaints procedure of the professional body.

# Caroline wages war on waste

We remain a throwaway society with the growth of household municipal waste spiralling out of control.

Solihull Council has just finished a consultation period on its recycling plan for the borough. They are right to try and get us to recycle more and discard less. The provision of compost bins has certainly brought some change in lifestyle. Children are beginning to learn the difference between things that can be turned into good compost and things that cannot. It has certainly reduced the amount of bin bags collected from my home.

In the UK we simply do not recycle enough waste and lag well behind our European neighbours. We produce more than 430 million tonnes of rubbish per year in the UK and in Solihull alone we generate an estimated 90,000 tonnes of household waste.

Yet households up and down the country only recycle on average, a mere 11% of rubbish. Solihull has to reach targets of recycling 18% of household waste by 2005/2006. At the moment the figure stands at 10%. There is still a long way to go to catch up with other European countries but every one of us can do our bit.

## WHAT WE THROW AWAY: UK HOUSEHOLD WASTE



Image reproduced by kind permission of Friends of the Earth

**"We produce more than 430 million tonnes of rubbish per year in the UK and in Solihull alone we generate an estimated 90,000 tonnes of household waste."** Caroline Spelman MP

## MP takes up the case of unwanted phonemasts

Four years ago the Government commissioned a report from independent experts to look into the effect of mobile phones and masts on people's health. The Stewart Report concluded that there was no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations but it recommended a pre-cautionary approach to the siting of base masts near sensitive sites.

Like many MPs up and down the country, Caroline's post has been full of concerns about these masts. In one case she was dealing with a mobile phone company who had placed a mast next door to a school with the beam of greatest intensity falling on the school grounds and through the classrooms, in direct contradiction to what is recommended in the Stewart Report. Parents and pupils brought this to Caroline's attention.

What she discovered was that licensed telecommunications operators can erect

masts of less than 15 metres without planning permission and just have to submit an application for prior approval to the local planning authority. If the mast is higher or in an area of outstanding natural beauty or national park, the operators have to follow the normal planning process.

Commenting on these Government guidelines, Caroline said: "What is most at fault are our planning laws. Local authorities cannot turn down applications on health grounds. The only argument protesters can use is if the mast is deemed to be a threat to a local amenity. All the companies are required to do before applying for approval or planning permission to site a mast near a school is 'consult' the school governors. It is ridiculous that people's genuine concerns are ignored in this fashion and I have taken this up directly with the Minister".



# Local residents' anger at more speed traps



***“There is growing public concern that speed camera fines are merely a way of raising money from already heavily taxed motorists.”***

**Caroline Spelman MP**

**Speed cameras are controversial, particularly when they are perceived to be poorly located.**

It's something that local MP Caroline Spelman feels strongly about: "Residents could face a barrage of new fines for driving on local roads, compounding the anger already felt by millions of motorists over fines from poorly located speed cameras.

Under the Government's new proposals, hundreds of extra traffic cameras could be installed at junctions, with drivers who stop in yellow box junctions facing fines of up to £100; traffic wardens would also be given powers to fine motorists. In addition, the DVLA has sepa-

rately announced it will automatically fine drivers £80 who do not renew their car tax disc without writing to the agency - even if the car is not being used.

"We all want our roads to be safer and reduce the instances of dangerous or irresponsible driving. But there is growing public concern that these new fines are merely a way of raising money from already heavily taxed motorists.

"One of the most notorious of the non-compliant speed cameras was found locally on the A45. This has been decommissioned because it was concealed behind a road sign and failed to meet the necessary visibility requirements. Since then

twelve other cameras have had to be decommissioned across the West Midlands.

"If anything, we should be reforming the existing regime of speed cameras. There needs to be an independent audit of existing speed cameras, so that they are placed only in genuine accident black spots, and local speed limits should reflect the danger of the road - such as 20 mph limits near schools.

"The most dangerous roads should see penalty points being raised from three to four or five, and any revenue from fines should be tightly ring-fenced solely for improving road safety."

## MP opens new childcare centre



**Caroline with childcare staff at the launch of the new Sensory Centre at Chelmsley Wood**

**The importance of early influences on childhood development is well documented.**

Speaking at the opening of a new Sensory Centre at Footprints Nursery in Chelmsley Wood, Caroline Spelman said: "As the mother of three young children, I am acutely aware of the importance of the early years and that is why I am so pleased to be opening this new Sensory Centre. It is a tribute to the efforts of the staff of the nursery who have worked long and hard to achieve this result.

"This new facility is very welcome and will be of huge benefit to the children who use it".

Footprints Nursery is funded as part of the Neighbourhood Nurseries Scheme which aims to provide accessible and affordable childcare in the most deprived areas. In Solihull, the aim is to develop six full daycare nurseries providing 290 places in Fordbridge, Smith's Wood, Kingshurst and Chelmsley Wood. However, due to delays in funding from the regional development agency, the project has been put on hold.

Expressing her disappointment about this delay, Mrs Spelman said: "It is unacceptable that after 2 years, funding has still not been finally approved. Childcare provision is essential not only for the development of children but also to provide parents with the choice to go back to work. I have been lobbying John Prescott whose department is responsible for regional development agencies about the lack of funding for this essential project".

## Iraq: we must get to the bottom of how we were led into war

**I am sure I am not the only one left with a profound sense of anger after Lord Hutton's report was published.**

I don't have a sense of justice being done and am deeply sorry for Dr. Kelly's family who have suffered a completely avoidable tragedy but I also feel

that Lord Hutton missed the point. Just at the time he was reporting on the global stage even senior American politicians like Colin Powell were admitting that the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) seemed not to be there.

The issue of whether we went to war on a false premise is very

serious indeed. As your elected representative I had to weigh up what was the right thing to do when voting on whether or not to go to war.

The intelligence and information we were given was that WMD could be launched in 45 minutes. There was no suggested that this meant battlefield

weapons only. I did ask questions only to receive the assurance that this came from the best source. Well, let us know the truth now about that source. This is important because I do not want to see a repetition of war-mongering on false pretences.

The stakes are far too high in

the Middle East and even the suggestion that the basis of military action was flawed will give ammunition to international terrorists. I feel so angry for the individuals hurt by this debacle.

This new inquiry must get to the bottom of the quality of intelligence and how it was used by those who led us into war.

# Meriden students protest against tuition fees



Caroline with students from Solihull College, Chelmsley Wood

The Government's Higher Education Bill introducing university fees of up to £3,000 a year has begun its passage through Parliament. The bill scraped through its second reading with a majority of only 5.

I have had a series of new graduates working in my office and there is nothing like first hand experience to help you decide where your sympathies lie. Even before these changes, Becky who worked for me, was a student at the London School of Economics and because of family circumstances qualified for a full student loan. Even so, she left university with debts of over £14,000 and that is after working through every holiday and during term time. It would have been tempting for Becky and countless other Beckys to have given up on education and we all need the talents of people like her. I know it first hand and for Meriden students, the repercussions will be felt for years. This Bill opens the door to increased tuition fees and increased debt for thousands of students, estimated to be as much as £30,000. University tuition fees are a tax on learning which is why I voted against them. They are a deterrent for hard-working and able students.

There is a fundamental principle at stake here. Access to further education should be determined on ability and not the ability to pay. It is a well known fact that countries with a higher proportion of graduates do better than those without, so for all of us this is of crucial importance. For a constituency like ours where the standard of education is high many parents aspire to send their children to university. However, some of you have told me you are thinking twice about this with tuition fees and level of debt young graduates will be saddled with, thus depriving the country of potentially some of the best graduates of the future. It is the families who have some savings and assets who face the full cost of these changes. My parents could not have afforded to send me to university but for a full maintenance grant. I am astounded that the Government can take such a short term view and deny the opportunity of a university education to so many.

Need to contact your MP?

**Caroline Spelman**

Member of Parliament for Meriden



If you need help or advice about an issue that is concerning you, contact me at one of these addresses:

House of Commons,  
London  
SW1A 0AA  
Tel: 020 7219 4189  
Fax: 020 7219 0378  
caroline@carolinespelman.com

or

Meriden Constituency Office  
2 Manor Road  
Solihull  
West Midlands  
B91 2BH  
Tel/Fax: 0121 711 2955  
Email: meridencon@clara.net

Alternatively, surgeries are a good opportunity for me to meet constituents and help with any problems you may have. Here are the forthcoming dates for surgeries in the constituency:

- Saturday 27 March**  
9am-10.30am & 11am-12pm, Chelmsley Wood Library, Arden Hall, Castle Bromwich
- Saturday 24 April**  
9am-10.30am & 11am-12pm, Chelmsley Wood Library, Arden Hall, Castle Bromwich
- Friday 30 April**  
4.30pm-6pm, Balsall Common Library
- Saturday 15 May**  
9am-10.30am & 11am-12pm, Chelmsley Wood Library, Arden Hall, Castle Bromwich
- Friday 28 May**  
4.30pm-6pm, Balsall Common Library
- Saturday 12 June**  
9am-10.30am & 11am-12pm, Chelmsley Wood Library, Arden Hall, Castle Bromwich
- Friday 25 June**  
4.30pm-6pm, Balsall Common Library
- Saturday 10 July**  
9am-10.30am & 11am-12pm, Chelmsley Wood Library, Arden Hall, Castle Bromwich
- Friday 16 July**  
4.30pm-6pm, Balsall Common Library
- Saturday 4 September**  
9am-10.30am & 11am-12pm, Chelmsley Wood Library, Arden Hall, Castle Bromwich
- Friday 17 September**  
4.30pm-6pm, Balsall Common Library
- Saturday 25 September**  
9am-10.30am & 11am-12pm, Chelmsley Wood Library, Arden Hall, Castle Bromwich
- Friday 15 October**  
4.30pm-6pm, Balsall Common Library
- Saturday 30 October**  
9am-10.30am & 11am-12pm, Chelmsley Wood Library, Arden Hall, Castle Bromwich
- Saturday 4 October**  
9am-10.30am & 11am-12pm, Chelmsley Wood Library, Arden Hall, Castle Bromwich
- Friday 17 October**  
4.30pm-6pm, Balsall Common Library



Take a look at Caroline's newly launched website on:

[www.carolinespelman.com](http://www.carolinespelman.com)