

# Mark Field MP

Westminster Review Summer 2006



Dear Fellow Resident,

Welcome to my second e-newsletter service to constituents. Please feel free to contact me on issues that are important to you by replying to this email or using the contact form on my website [www.markfieldmp.com](http://www.markfieldmp.com)

*Mark Field*

## WORKING IN WESTMINSTER

In Parliament I have led a debate on saving St Bartholomew's Hospital, which came under threat in the early part of the year, and have spoken out against the suggestion that the Royal Parks will be used as campsites during the 2012 Olympics.

I have also led a number of debates for the Opposition on the National Lotteries Bill. It is my fundamental position that money from the National Lottery should continue to be given to the four good causes of arts, heritage, sports and charity, rather than used for projects which should be government-funded.

Since the start of the year I have published articles on a range of subjects including the National Lottery; urban design; my trips to India, the Caribbean and South Asia; the local election results; Britishness; libraries; my culture brief; and theatres.

My speeches and articles can be found on my regularly updated website ([www.markfieldmp.com](http://www.markfieldmp.com))

## ENCOURAGED BY ENERGY IN THE WORLD OF ARTS

In my role as Shadow Minister for Culture, what has surprised me above all has been the amount of sheer hard work, innovation and inspiration shown by so many involved in the arts and culture world - from those employed by galleries, museums and libraries to the individuals who work to create a thriving National Lottery and beautiful Royal Parks. I am also lucky that a significant proportion of the events to which I am invited place me four-square within the constituency.

I regard culture as an integral part of a vision for a better quality of life for all our people. In an age of a more consumerist outlook, with a new demand for ever more choice and better quality in our public services, we all need to recognise that the provision of arts and culture needs to move with the times. As communities become ever more disparate and fragmented, there is an increasing importance to be attached to the power of culture and the arts as a unifying force to bring people together.

I have always believed in 'art for art's sake.' In an increasingly target-driven environment, the world of arts and heritage will inevitably suffer if public spending in this area is justified only on the grounds of extraneous benefits, such as to lower crime rates or to improve educational standards. Inevitably during times of financial constraint, if the case for spending on the arts is only on the basis of strict utilitarian benefit to society then budgets are most vulnerable to swingeing reduction.

The world of museums and galleries has been a particular joy not least given the passion and commitment shown by so many of those who work in the sector. Supporting a thriving, innovative cultural world in which quality of life and civility amongst all of us as urban dwellers is promoted is, I believe, an important part of community values and helping to make life better for everyone.

## MIDDLE EAST BESET BY DISHARMONY

The news for the first six months of the year has focused on the conflicts across much of the Middle East region. At the time of writing the upsurge in violence in Israel, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authorities shows how terrorist organisations are developing greater and greater destructive capability. We can be in no doubt that the funding of such powerful munitions and armed efforts comes from other Middle Eastern states and there seems little respite for the local populations in the conflicts. It is heartbreaking to see the beautiful city of Beirut pulverised again after its years of rebuilding.

During the last few years I have visited Israel, Jordan, Qatar,

Syria and the West Bank and I am hoping to go to Iran in the near future. During many of my visits I was shocked in some of the Arab states at the lack of aspiration both by its political leaders and its people. I felt I could almost touch the frustration of the many ordinary people who continue to crave a life without constant conflict so that real futures could be built for all. *Cont. at foot of next page*



**A STRONG VOICE FOR LOCAL PEOPLE**

Mark Field MP, Cities of London & Westminster, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA



# CONSTITUENCY SURVEY: CITY OF LONDON

As most of you will be aware, I carry out regular local surveys. In the late Spring I asked residents in the City of London to comment on three subjects, namely identity cards, the age of retirement and libraries. A summary of the findings is as follows:

## LIBRARIES

The enthusiasm for this subject was evident from the very first letter I received. The Barbican library itself came in for many favourable mentions and the overall tenor of responses was for the preservation and continuance of our library system. What that system should involve and include was where a huge diversity of views occurred. Support for later openings outside 'normal' office hours was very strong, as was the passion for refreshment of the book stock. There was a three-way split over charging sizeable fees, small fees and no fees for borrowing books, though everybody agreed that charges should be made for DVDs and CDs. There were many constructive suggestions about the importance of refurbishing libraries and making them more comfortable. From some quarters there was a strong appeal for more money to be spent on technology in libraries; from others there was a desire for courses to be run within libraries.



As some of you may be aware, I have been involved in the current debate on libraries in my role of Shadow Minister for Culture. On June 15 I chaired a forum on libraries here in the House of Commons. More than eighty people attended and it was extremely valuable to have had so many

insights from this recent survey during the event. Not surprisingly the feelings expressed during the forum corresponded very closely with those who responded to my survey - namely that the enthusiasm for libraries was very strong but the views were very polarised about the future development of the library service, especially in regards to book levels and the expansion of computer and internet usage in libraries.

## IDENTITY CARDS

Two thirds of those responding were firmly against ID cards, voluntary or compulsory. Even of the 33% of those in favour, a third had reservations. A very noticeable element of the results was that most of the people who had been accustomed to living in another country with ID cards were in favour. Almost all people were concerned at the cost of implementation and only a small minority thought they would be of value in preventing terrorism. The overall impression from the survey was that my constituents generally felt that a proper case had not been made for the implementation of such cards. If a system was to be developed there were many who wanted to see NHS and other entitlements incorporated in the cards.

## THE AGE OF RETIREMENT

A little over half of the respondents were in favour of allowing people to work as long as they wanted. In the majority of letters sent to me the word 'complex' was used in relation to the issue of the age of retirement. So it is, but I have been very appreciative of the thoughtful nature of responses. There were many people who said that the retirement age should be raised (18% favoured 68 years, and a further 11% 70 years of age). Surprisingly to me there was very little support for the age of retirement to remain at 65 (7%) and most of the other respondents (14%) believed there was a need for a minimum but not compulsory retirement age.

## MIDDLE EASTERN WOES

*Cont. from page one.* But the religious fanatics continue to hold sway in so many of the countries and the teaching of victimisation, hatred and violence to the young that I saw makes me feel that the world may not see peace in the region for decades.

I began 2006 with the hopeful message that the New Year would see increased harmonious and peaceful working between nations and peoples.

I fear that this year will be remembered for the violent Middle East conflicts which continue to capture the headlines across the globe. What this part of the world desperately needs is more influence from home-grown statesmen such as King Abdullah of Jordan - a young, energetic ruler with a keen eye on the future.

Thanks must go to all those who responded to my survey, and to my dedicated staff, both at the House of Commons and in my Ebury Street constituency office, for their hard work and support.

I hope you all have a restful and enjoyable summer!



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