

## Mike Rigby – An Independent voice for Taunton Deane

- **Reviving Taunton's flagging economic fortunes:** There is a lack of ambition for the town. I have been frustrated and dismayed as Taunton, our county town, has faded. There have been improvements made to Castle Green, Goodlands Gardens and the area between the Brewhouse and the Cricket Ground. But there remain huge areas of neglect. High Street, supposedly our prime shopping street, is an embarrassment. Firepool has been vacant since the council allowed the cattle market to move to Bridgwater over a decade ago. I want to see the empty SW Regional Fire Centre brought into use, providing jobs and income into Taunton Deane. I want a rebalancing of the structure of the local economy, to compensate for the loss of public sector jobs and proactively work to attract private sector employers, including vital small and medium businesses and independent traders. That is why I became a founder member of [Taunton Forward](#) (a taskforce of businesses, employers and talented individuals) determined to transform Taunton Deane into the prime regional centre for business, shopping, tourism, the arts and entertainment. I support the Arena Campaign for Taunton.
- **Pressure for over-development of towns and villages across the Deane:** We need to cherish and preserve the character of Taunton as a County Town and also all of the towns and villages right across the Deane. Forecasts for Taunton Deane housing needs must be realistic and for all planned and approved development to be genuinely sustainable, by ensuring that the school places and roads can cope with the demands arising from approved development. I am concerned that the National Planning Policy Framework is a 'developers' charter'. I support a fundamental review of the new NPPF planning rules to provide a better balance between development, sustainability and the environment. I want to see more availability of affordable and social housing, not less. I will support prioritising building on brownfield sites before greenfield sites but not at the expense of employment land. I also favour reform of tenancy law where longer-term tenancies are the norm and rents are increased in accordance with price-based indices. Such changes would also give tenants security of tenure; something especially important to families with children at school.
- **Protecting vital public services:** I am concerned that Government funding cuts in Adult Social Care (26% in real terms) provided by the County Council are now impacting on the NHS and increasing "bed blocking" at Musgrove Park Hospital; which can only get worse in Somerset with an ageing population and our popularity as a retirement area. I will vote for the joining up of health and social care in an integrated way, so that support and services follow the cared-for people. We all value community services like Children's Centres, Libraries, Youth centres, Day centres, residential care, recycling etc and those community services need to be protected. I will consult as to what services you, the people, want and campaign on your behalf for a fairer share of national expenditure for these areas, as we receive far less per head for council services than most other councils in the UK. For efficiency and joined-up government, I will support a local government reorganisation in Somerset to deliver one unitary authority in place of the inherent inefficiency of six district and county councils that we now have; I will at the same time propose and support a Town Council for Taunton and devolution to and a greater role for existing Parish and Town councils right across the Deane.

- **Transport priorities set locally:** Our roads across Somerset are deteriorating. I see the solution as a combination of some new roads to relieve central congestion, including a northern bypass and southern link for Taunton and the provision of a comprehensive network of cycle paths in order to get more commuters out of cars. We need to support bus routes as well for those who rely upon them, especially those connecting villages and towns. The priorities of the government have been questionable, with potential “white elephant” projects like HS2 receiving massive and disproportionate funding, while we await A358 dualling, electrification of the railways past Bristol into the South West and the re-opening of Wellington station and the building of further park and ride schemes.
- **Engaging with young people:** I would like to see Taunton become a University town and alongside that, promote a vibrant, mixed economy that helps retain our skilled young people to work and live here after completing their education. I will vote for fair funding for schools in Taunton Deane (restoring it to at least 2010 levels in real terms). I support a policy that all of our teachers are properly qualified. I support the restoration of financial assistance for post-16 students to stay on in education. I support a return to parents being able to take their children on one term-time trip per year. I support an end to Free Schools and a return to properly-funded local control of schools.
- **Environment:** Climate Change is a serious, global issue that could impact significantly on future generations. We all need to play our part in tackling it. We need to reduce emissions across all sectors, including transport – hence the need for locally determined transport schemes. I will support increased protection for our hills and moors in AONBs and National Parks. I will promote action to re-establish peat bogs and restore upland wetlands to promote biodiversity and slow the flow of water into flood plains. I will lobby as a Somerset MP for funding to continue to be made available for flood defence, with the involvement of local small and medium companies, for direct local benefit. I will support a scheme of mass insulation for our inefficient homes.
- **NHS:** The Conservatives led a top-down reorganisation of the NHS, that is reported as costing some £1.7 billion and that has opened a back door to fragmentation of our NHS Services, through privatisation via the Health and Social Care Act. I have adopted the National Health Action Party’s health policy: *“We must restore the NHS as a safe, comprehensive, publicly funded, publicly delivered, and publicly accountable integrated healthcare system by reversing the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and supporting an “NHS re-instatement” Bill, to halt and reverse NHS privatisation.”* Musgrove Park Hospital and our GP and community health services are valued by our communities and I will fight to protect them.
- **Immigration** Many people in the country are concerned about the levels of immigration to the UK in recent years. Here in Somerset, we have seen mostly EU-based Eastern European immigration, with generally good community relations and Taunton Deane continues to have low unemployment levels. We must ensure that the impacts from immigration on local schools, the NHS and other local services are fully funded from central Government, who benefit from the additional tax revenue. There is also a need for careful monitoring of local employment, to ensure that local wage levels are not negatively affected. I strongly support a move, over time, to the Living Wage and I would like to see Zero Hours contracts phased out for those who want regular hours and incomes.