



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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A hundred and fifty years ago, open-air meetings in towns and cities were at the heart of the hurly-burly of political life on everything from corn prices to electoral reform. The Speakers' Corner initiative is an important attempt to revitalise this tradition and encourage local communities to take part in political debate and have their say.

In my Blackburn constituency I hold regular open-air assemblies and residents' meetings. I know from this experience that they are an effective way of engaging the public in genuine, rigorous political discussion.

At a time when politicians and institutions are seen as remote and out of touch, and when political debate is often conducted through impersonal means of mass mail-shots and telephone messaging, open-air meetings provide a unique opportunity for people to debate directly with their elected representatives and their fellow citizens.

In the UK we sometimes forget how lucky we are to have free speech and what an important part it plays in our modern day life. The Speakers' Corner project is a celebration of that freedom and a vital tool in the drive to combat political disengagement at home and abroad. I am delighted to give it my support.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jack Straw'.

JACK STRAW