

## **Small business, big voice in Cherwell**

The Oxfordshire branch of the FSB hosted the latest of its regular Meet Your MP breakfast meetings on 29 January in Banbury. Local MP Tony Baldry delivered a typically forthright account of the current 'state of the nation', through the eyes of a Conservative ex-minister who has represented Banbury for some 27 years, serving as a minister under both Margaret Thatcher and John Major.

Fielding numerous questions from FSB members and a selection of invited guests, Baldry covered key issues such as banks, bonuses and their - still inadequate - lending policies; the economy and building a recovery; apprenticeships; local and university education and funding; the poor response to the January snowfalls; local planning issues in Banbury and Bicester; and getting people back to work by any means, including via the Cherwell District Council-backed Job Clubs.

In the same week that the FSB launched its 2010 election manifesto, Small Business, Big Vote at the House of Commons, FSB Member Llewellyn Bankes-Hughes presented a personal copy of the document to Tony Baldry, who rued the fact that in the run-up to the next election, the normal business of government at Westminster already feels as if it has already been put on hold.

During the breakfast, held at the offices of the event's sponsor, Banbury-based accounting firm, Ellacotts, Oxfordshire branch chair, Margaret Coles, presented the FSB's Thames Valley Small Business Friendly Award to Kieron Mallon, on behalf of Cherwell District Council.

The award was made in recognition of the Council's ongoing commitment to supporting small businesses via the Job Clubs and in particular through the Oxfordshire Business Enterprises (OBE). The OBE stands as a perfect example of how these partnerships should operate. The OBE and partners (Business Link, Enterprise Hub and Citizens Advice) provide a vital service to small business looking for support and assistance during these times of difficult trading conditions. The results have been impressive and the 580 one-to-one small business advice and mentoring sessions have clearly demonstrated the need for this type of targeted support for small business.