

Ayes to the site

Peers' websites provide a useful portal to the work of members of the Upper Chamber, says **Lord Lexden**

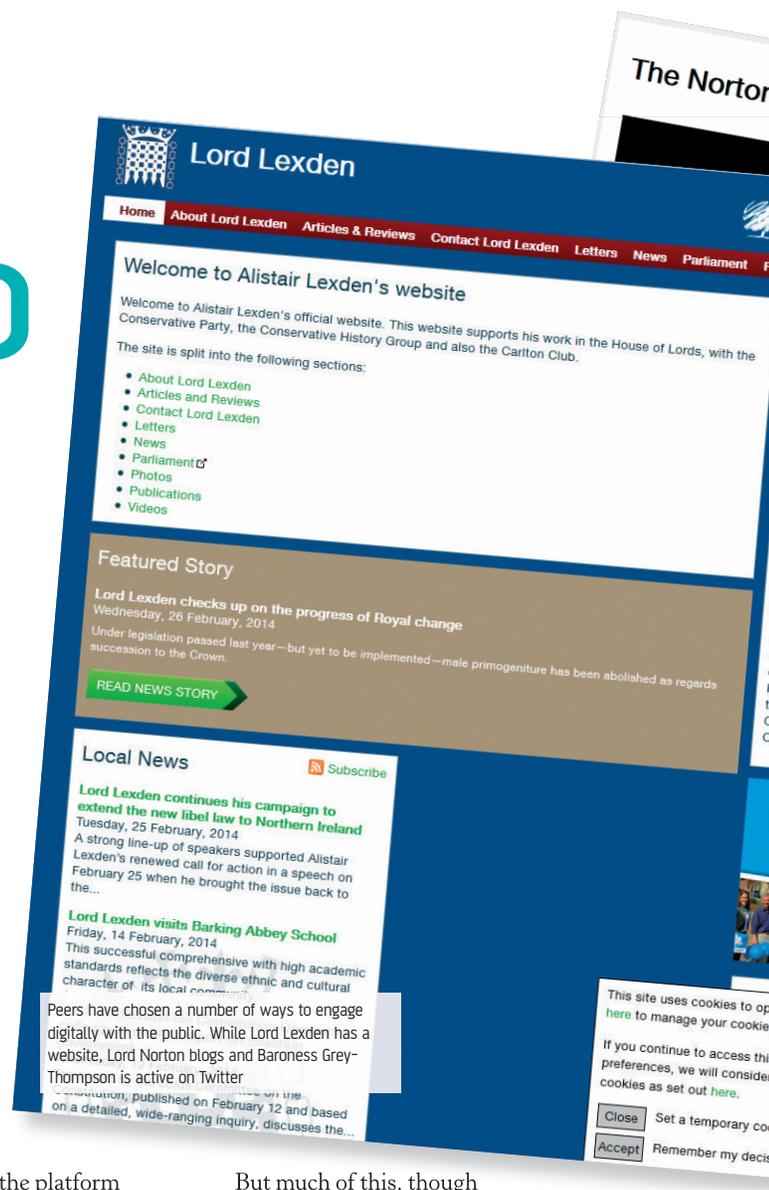
In the House of Lords last month we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the world wide web in a debate led by Martha Lane-Fox. Contributions ranged far and wide – as is to be expected in our House – but a number of speakers touched on the way in which the internet has changed so dramatically the way we can communicate and promote our work.

As members of an unelected, appointed House we need to point out constantly to the public why we are here, what our role as a revising, scrutinising Chamber is, and the contribution we make to the democratic process as a result of the way we improve legislation. And the internet is a remarkably easy and effective way to help us do that.

This is a subject which our Information Committee – under the redoubtable Chairmanship of Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope – keeps under close surveillance. But because the internet makes authors of us all – and presents us with so many platforms

to explain our work – we can all lend him a hand.

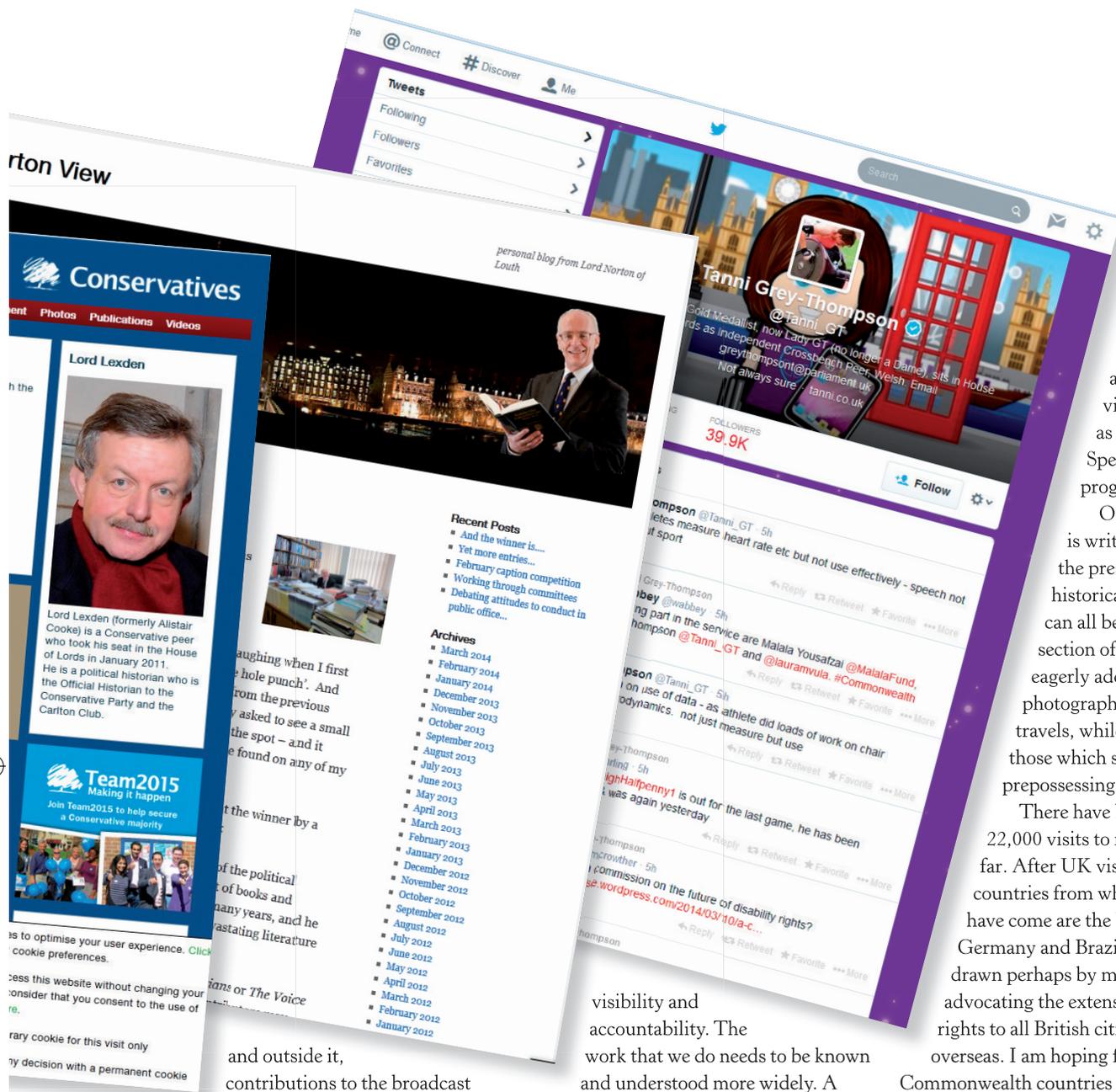
The digital revolution has provided many different ways to do this, and fellow peers can choose for themselves the platform that suits them best. That is the web's great strength. Some of us who want to produce short, sharp messages, tweet – not something, I must admit, that is ever likely to attract me. Others promote our work via Facebook. Some – like my long-standing friend, Lord Norton of Louth, as great an expert in a Chamber of experts that you would ever wish to meet – have their own admirable blogs. Many of us take part in the Lords of the Blog.



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But much of this, though important as well as enjoyable, is transitory. A tweet makes a single point and disappears into the digital ether. Blogs, valuable and interesting though they are, tend to be about issues of immediate, often passing interest and are not always easy to find.

That is why I believe more peers should consider running their own websites, where they can both comment on matters of contemporary interest and, crucially, create an archive of material about their activities – speeches in the House



reviews, including of course those which have appeared in *The House*. I add the school visits that I make as part of the Lord Speaker's outreach programme.

One of my hobbies is writing letters to the press, usually with historical points. They can all be found in another section of the website. I eagerly add all the flattering photographs taken on my travels, while discarding those which show a less prepossessing person!

There have been some 22,000 visits to my website so far. After UK visitors, the four countries from which most of them have come are the USA, France, Germany and Brazil, some of them drawn perhaps by my speeches advocating the extension of voting rights to all British citizens living overseas. I am hoping for more from Commonwealth countries since I do all I can to highlight the plight of homosexuals in so many of them where they are treated as criminals.

Most of those who get in touch with me raise interesting and constructive points to which it is fun to reply. Every week brings its surprises. I have just been asked to address a conference of house builders on the history of housing – a subject rather far removed from the ups and downs of the Conservative Party over the centuries about which I do claim to know something. 🏠

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and outside it, contributions to the broadcast media, articles in the press, their books and so on – and photographs that are of long-term interest.

A website can build up a full picture of our work and breadth of interests. It provides an easy way through which users of the internet can communicate with us and discuss aspects of our work that is of interest to them. It provides a permanent record of our contributions to our House which is of use to journalists, commentators and – in time – historians. But above all – particularly set alongside the extremely useful *They Work For Us* website – it aids those things which are so crucial to effective communication of our role: transparency,

visibility and accountability. The work that we do needs to be known and understood more widely. A personal website can help tremendously.

I had a website set up for me by a kind friend, Adrian Harris, then website manager at Conservative Campaign Headquarters, when I came into the House three years ago. It records everything of public significance, both political and non-political, that I do. It provides electronic links to the speeches that I have made in the Chamber, and to my oral questions. I include the main points from speeches that I make outside the House, and the full text of occasional lectures (such as the one I gave on Prince Albert and British politics in Coburg last September). The articles and reviews section of the website contains all my historical pieces and book