

Let Alok Sharma as chairman and deal maker fly to meetings, but how many others?

The establishment elite that perform the rites and fashion the weapons of the war on carbon are in danger of slipping into the bad practices of some past priesthoods. The officials and grandees tell us they need to fly around the world to conferences like COP 26 to spread the word. I can see the case for the chairman of the global conference to meet key players face to face in their own settings to try to do a deal, but the case for others is by no means clear. Too many fly around the world to tell others not to fly but to holiday near to home and to communicate on Zoom or Teams. When challenged about their own lifestyles which seem detached from Mission Net Zero they reply that it is fine because they are “offsetting” all the carbon their flights, chauffeured cars, air conditioned hotels and meat banquets generate. In other words they use taxpayers money to grant aid activities like tree planting or renewable power installation to claim a carbon offset.

As one of leading advocates of net Zero, Bill Gates helpfully explains in his book “I own big houses and fly in private planes- in fact I took one to Paris for the climate change conference – so who am I to lecture anyone on the environment?” “It’s true that my carbon footprint is absurdly high. .. In 2020 I started buying sustainable jet fuel and will fully offset my family’s aviation missions in 2021. For our non aviation emissions I am buying offsets through a company that runs a facility that removes carbon dioxide from the air”. At least Bill Gates uses his own money to offset that carbon footprint and grasps that others might see it differently.

I am disappointed that COP26 is not a virtual conference. The combination of the messaging on jet travel and the wish of many governments to restrict jet travel to stop the spread of covid would seem to make a strong case for a virtual meeting. There will be critics who will not be easily assuaged by knowledge of carbon offsets. There will also be plenty of examination of the nature of those carbon offsets to see if they are genuine and not being miscounted.

The efforts to place a price on carbon are creating inflation in various green investments as well as the more useful boosting of investment in things like trees and renewable power. They are also leading governments into seizing another new way of taxing us, by placing carbon taxes and carbon border taxes on items we need.

Governments need to explain how they will tax non fossil fuels in the world they want where they lose most of the tax on oil and gas. They also need to set out where all the electrical power is coming up from to fuel the electrical revolution.

Earley BBQ

On Saturday evening it was good to join local members of the Conservative party for a BBQ in Earley. There was a good range of questions about the pandemic, vaccinations, economic recovery, housing and planning. I also talked a bit about levelling up and ways of getting the NHS back to full running for non covid treatments.

The US retreat from Afghanistan

The news from Afghanistan is worrying. Twenty years after the first military actions by the US and her allies in Afghanistan President Biden announced a rapid withdrawal of US forces. I have no disagreement with the aim of getting out. I agree that the UK also had to leave quickly as soon as the larger US force left. We were a smaller part of a coalition force and had to think of the safety of our forces in a volatile situation. I do have a disagreement with the sudden speed of the USA planned departure, and the apparent shortcomings in reassuring the Afghan government and leaving in place enough advice and support to make their task easier.

It is surprising that given the longer term cross party aim in the USA to leave defence and policing to Afghan forces that more successful plans were not already effective for advice and training of the now considerable Afghan forces. A lot of effort had we are told gone in to allow them to handle any insurgency or violent subversion of the state. There was a good argument to say that keeping foreign forces there for too long to suppress violence could be seen by some Afghans as a provocation that helped recruit more opponents against democratic government. There was an even better argument that at some point to prove Afghanistan has become a self sustaining democracy it has to be left to Afghan people and institutions to defend its new order and to subsume critics within a democratic system to resolve or handle differences. They can of course ask for advice or specialist help from allies, but Afghan forces should take full responsibility for law and order.

Russia and now NATO have found Afghanistan a difficult place for operations. President Biden seems to lack a clear vision of what if any role he wishes the USA to assume in the Middle East. We know he is not as pro Israel and as anti Iran as President Trump, but we do not yet know what he is trying to achieve and how he sees the new threats instability bring in the region.

Smiths level crossing Wokingham

I met with local residents, the main authorised user of the crossing and Network Rail today. Local residents find the warning noise made for each of the 123 trains a day using this piece of track very disruptive, along with bright traffic style lights on the crossing and spoken warnings when more than one train is involved.

Safety is rightly the priority. I queried again the high speed limit of 70 mph given that this is a bend in the track close to the merger of the Waterloo and North Downs lines and close to Wokingham station to the west. Network Rail confirmed that in practice a train is likely to be travelling at half the speed limit on the bend to be safe, especially in wet and slippery conditions. The speed rating of the track affects the style of warnings needed.

Two of the local residents put their case well to Network Rail, who have promised to go away and see if they can work up proposals to keep the 4 authorised users safe but tackle the intrusive noise. The lights also need adjusting to reduce glare into homes whilst still be clearly visible to users on the ground near the crossing. I will follow up to see what solution is proposed.

The Archbishop of York is right about England, wrong about the remedy

It has taken the Anglican Church long soaked in the views of the international elite an age to discover the cause of England. Despite carrying our country's name in its own the C of E has regularly adopted fashionable global and EU tropes that are unwelcome to many in a doughty independent island country with global reach and ambition.

The Archbishop is by inference attacking the Lambeth Palace and Brussels oriented views of recent Archbishops of Canterbury by remembering his own Northern roots. He then reveals he too lacks understanding of how Englishmen and women feel by recommending we get another dose of regional devolution within England. So like the EU elite he wants to break up and balkanise England whilst leaving Scottish and Welsh devolution whole at the country level. The whole point about the English case is we wish to have for England some of the same devolved rights that Scotland enjoys.

I proposed to David Cameron that we gave England EVEN, English votes for English needs, in the Commons. Instead of setting up a costly new English Parliament with extra MPs and a new building, why not let UK MPs elected to Westminster carry the dual mandate and meet as a Grand Committee at Westminster for any legislation or budgetary review matters that would mirror those powers devolved to Scotland or Wales. Mr Cameron on advice from Mr Hague watered that down to an English veto on English laws, with no right to initiate an English proposal for English MPs. Now Mr Gove has removed even that.

Meanwhile we need a BBC that gives equal billing to England as to Scotland. Why is there no BBC England? We need an anthem for English teams that we know and want to sing, and a better and more sympathetic presentation of English history, literature and culture by English and UK institutions.