

## Visit to Arborfield Green

On Friday I visited new homes under construction by Crest at Arborfield Green, in order to accompany the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. He was on a visit to launch the government's new policy of promoting more affordable homes for purchase.

He used his visit to Wokingham to launch a new scheme which can offer a discount of up to 30% on the price of a new home for a first time buyer from the locality or a key worker like an NHS medical professional or teacher.

I also talked to the Crest staff about local issues connected to traffic, water management and pace of development.

---

## Catching criminals

The new government is allocating more money to the police and recruiting more police personnel. At the same time figures have emerged showing a current low level of clear up of many reported crimes. I would be interested in your views on what the police priorities should be, as they set about deploying the additional police that become available to them.

Some say there is currently insufficient attention to burglary, breaking and entering and car theft. Others counter that social media hate crime can lead to crimes of violence, and that on line fraud is now a more serious source of theft than break ins. Given that the police cannot be everywhere and have to prioritise their energy and time, what would be a good balance?

How much attention should be given to traffic offences? How can the police prevent domestic violence without getting dragged into many family disputes that will not end in violence? Can we get better at spending the big sums the state as a whole spends on troubled families? Then there could be less need for police intervention as social services and welfare have found ways to get people through their problems that could otherwise spark anti social behaviour and worse.

Nationally there is considerable concern about knife crime, and a clear wish to see convicted terrorists kept away from harming the public more. There is also a strong wish to police our borders better once fully out of the EU so we do not admit additional criminals in the first place.

---

## Congestion issues

Out and about and on doorsteps I find congestion is the most common concern. The combination of new traffic lights, road closures for utility renewal and road closures for new homes and related works are delaying too many people trying to take children to school, to get to work or get to the shops.

The advent of new lights on King Street Lane for the junction with the Winnersh by pass has created new delays. I have asked the Council to rephrase those lights from four way to two way with filters, with the main flow north south having the longest time in the complete phase to reflect traffic patterns.

The main crossroad lights in Winnersh with the A 329 and B3030 should be converted to two way with filters from four way, which would increase the capacity of the junction considerably. The Council should also consider re phasing of the lights on Wellington Road and by the station as this too is a bottleneck.

---

## The price of green policies

Yesterday I heard a short discussion on the media about the rising cost of renewables on the typical electricity bill. Some think it unfair that low income consumers have to pay the renewable surcharge alongside better off consumers. Others think it right as we are all users of power, and the cost has risen thanks to the renewable surcharge. Those who want to take the surcharge off lower income consumers either want the whole charge put onto general taxation as a subsidy to the power industry, or want means testing of the bills with reductions for low incomes.

This raises the bigger question of how much are people prepared to pay to go green. In Chile there were riots over higher charges that led to the last global climate change conference having to move to a different country to avoid the protests. In France the jilets jaune movement started as a protest over high fuel taxes imposed for green policy reasons. In the UK it was popular politics to suspend or cancel planned fuel tax increases.

As governments consider new tough targets for the next fifteen years they start to have more reality. They do mean according to their advocates the end of all diesel and petrol cars, the wholesale replacement of all conventional heating systems in people's homes, the complete electrification of the railways and the total greening of the electricity generation system within a few years. Given the increasing reliance on electrical power it will also require a substantial increase in generating capacity.

I would be interested to hear views on how much of these big investment and spending programmes should be paid for by the users and consumers, and how much from higher taxes on those same consumers. The polling points to a tension between the numbers who think we should do all these things, and the numbers who think they should help pay for it. This also has a bearing on the pace of change people want.

---

## Average incomes and growth rates

I do find it extraordinary that people write in to complain about me citing World Bank figures for GDP and Incomes per head for the EU, UK and USA. They complain I am attacking the EU because it shows the EU with the lowest figures of the three. I am merely stating the facts as set out by an international body these correspondents are usually keen to praise. I have no reason to doubt their past statistics, though I do not always agree with their forecasts.

As we prepare for full departure from the EU it is most important we look at what works. What does the USA get right to promote prosperity, freedom and happiness for the greatest number, and what does the EU get right? What do we wish to change, because we are currently following the EU model, and what do we wish to keep because it is good?

One of the big differences which will be contentious with some is the different approach to energy. The USA is increasing its output of oil and gas from onshore deposits. The EU is against further exploitation of oil and gas deposits and shale reservoirs at home, but is wedded to importing more gas from Russia. It is busy constructing a new large pipeline to increase its dependency on Russian gas. If you wish to promote higher incomes and more jobs at home you need to accept more domestically produced gas and oil. If you wish to be greener you need to reduce reliance on Russian gas and find alternatives that meet your green requirements.

The USA has increased its oil output by more than fifty percent, taking it up to 13 million barrels a day this year. This big expansion in recent years has been an important boost to incomes and jobs. Meanwhile Germany imports 90million tonnes of oil a year, and burns its way through 66 million tonnes of coal a year to keep the wheels of its car factories and other industrial activity turning. Burning so much coal is not a good idea in the leading industrial economy in the EU which claims it is a world leader in removing fossil fuels. The EU is a large user of coal but is of course dwarfed by China which consumes 4 billion tonnes of coal a year. None of these industrial economies is yet able to rein in their use of fossil fuels in the way the Green movement would like.

The UK needs to move back to energy self sufficiency, without coal in the mix. This may well require more UK gas to replace imports as well as further

renewable electrical power.