

Good bye to a decade

The 20 teens were hesitant years. There was a cautious economic recovery from the slump of 2008-10, as the deficit was tamed and capacity gently rebuilt.

There was a crisis over the UK's role in the world. The ruling elites saw the UK as part of the EU project to centralise power, with the UK as a covert participant in the mighty task of European political, monetary and economic integration. A majority of the public wanted the UK to return to being an independent country, capable of self government with a confident outward looking view of herself in a global world. Happy to trade with the EU, keen to travel, to promote many exchanges in education, culture and tourism, the majority saw no need to lock us into a political union to allow these things to continue. They will continue anyway when we leave as they do for many other independent countries having dealings with the EU .

The elite's refusal to accept the decision of the people led to undue stresses and strains on most of the institutions of the UK state. The Central Bank, already brought low by its failure to stop excesses in credit prior to 2008 and by its clumsy and damaging over correction, entered the fray against the majority decision. The Courts took up cases against government and Parliament, and made decisions designed to slow down or prevent *Brexit*.

Parliament itself turned against Brexit, despite most MPs being elected in 2017 for Labour or Conservative on promises to see it through. Brexiteers were left with the irony that the very institution they wished to restore to full power did not want that power and spent its time trying to prevent the UK taking control of its own money, laws and borders.

Some large companies turned out endless propaganda against Brexit as if the decision had not been made, repeating the often phoney claims of future economic damage that they had used to try to get people to vote their way in the first place.

The EU itself refused to accept the verdict of the UK people, and worked with the Remain forces in the UK to seek delay or damaging terms for exit that might get the public to change their mind.

Despite all of this the people voted again decisively as the decade ended to get Brexit done. That included many who voted just to leave, and others who voted for the Withdrawal Agreement on offer in anticipation of a Free Trade Agreement to follow. Tomorrow I will look at how and why the next decade can be so much better.

Unauthorised encampments

Constituents have raised with me the adequacy of the law governing illegal encampments. I have taken this up with government, who are now consulting on how to strengthen the law to prevent such occupation of land.

The consultation is open until March. Those concerned might like to respond, at

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-police-powers-to-tackle-unauthorised-encampments.

New Year message

I look forward to 2020 full of hope and optimism.

The new government has a majority and has energy to make things better. I am delighted they have made Prosperity the main aim of policy, as I asked them to do. I am putting in plenty of ideas about the January budget to give our economy the boost it needs and to leave people with more of their own money to spend. I look forward to the arrival of the extra money for schools, surgeries and the police in our area that I have battled for in recent years.

The New Year makes many people reappraise and ask themselves if we can do things better than in the year just gone. In politics it would be difficult to do things worse than in 2019. A fractured and angry Parliament prevented government governing, accentuated the negative, and let the country down. It undermined our negotiating position with the EU and needlessly delayed our exit.

This year we not only want a positive policy to improve public services and quicken growth in the economy, but we need to try to bring more people together behind that common purpose. Our public discourse has been more rancorous than robust, often nasty rather than incisive or illuminating.

On the central issue of our membership of the EU we can learn from the past. As a young man casting one of my first votes I voted to leave the European Community in 1975. I was on the losing side. I accepted the verdict of the voters and resolved to do my best to keep the spirit of what the majority voted for, membership of a free trade area or common market. It was only two decades later that I started to think we needed another referendum, when our country was plunged into a deep recession by our membership of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, a close commitment to the EU which was not envisaged in the original referendum. It is one of those unwritten rules of democratic politics that if you lose an election or referendum you accept the will of

the majority. It is also an unwritten rule that the majority should be attentive to the worries and concerns of the minority and seek to allay their fears or deal with their problems.

In that spirit this government needs to ensure that as we leave the EU there is none of the economic damage some have forecast. I have always held the view that we can be better off out and have set out the policies we need to follow to achieve that. It will be a central task for me to make that case in the new Parliament. It is also important to show how we will still travel to the continent, have many trade, cultural and educational links with the continent, and enjoy the wider European culture.

I do not regard Remain voters any less favourably than Leave voters, and will judge everyone's case on its merits. All I ask in return is that passionate Remainers understand that we Leavers are motivated by our view of what is best for our country and communities. We wish to work closely with all our fellow citizens to improve lives and promote happiness and prosperity. I have lived most of my life with the answer on EU membership I did not want, but have not let it embitter me. I have often had to live under a Labour government I did not welcome, but never challenged their right to govern when they had won the election.

So let us enjoy the freedoms of our democracy in the new year. Let us have robust and strong debate, but let us play down the nastiness and abuse which came to replace such democratic principles too often last year. Far from improving democracy shouting abuse is an attempt to close it down. It damages the very liberties which make this country great.

Tackling outdoor sleeping – more money for local Councils

I am glad the government has announced new measures and money to reduce sleeping on our streets. People should never have to sleep outside, especially when it so cold and wet. West Berkshire Council will receive £69,585 for Homelessness Support next year, and £104,834 to help homelessness prevention. Wokingham Council will receive £338,056 for Homelessness Support and £65,253 for Homelessness prevention.

These sums are proportionate to the level of rough sleeping we find in our area. It is a much greater problem in parts of London, where for example the Borough of Newham will receive £10.7m under the two headings to deal with their much larger problem. Other London Boroughs also receive several millions each reflecting their higher level of need.

I look forward to the local Councils adding these sums to their existing housing and social service budgets., Very often the underlying problem for a

rough sleeper is wider than the immediate absence of a roof over their heads. It requires help to be offered to deal with addictions or to help them find work. The policy is for everyone to have the option of a hostel place or temporary accommodation, though of course the authorities cannot make someone take up such an offer. If you do meet someone with no shelter to go to please tell them that the Council is there with ways to help.

Can we discuss the performance of the Bank of England?

Media commentary on the outgoing Governor and the new Governor hit a new low. We were told of the rock star Governor leaving, with silly mildly abusive comments on the alleged personality of the incoming Governor. There was no critical commentary of the failings of current Bank policy, nor comment on the huge opportunities to change things for the better under new direction.

Governor Carney leaves an economy stalled, pursuing a uniquely tight money policy at a time when all the other main Central Banks are rightly fighting slowdown and recession with a range of monetary tools at their disposal. He has been besotted by Brexit to the point where he has not understood the forces at work on the UK, which are largely the same as anywhere else in a globalised world economy suffering from sluggish growth and mercifully low inflation in the advanced world. All the time he has been Governor we have been full members of the EU, just as he wanted .

When he first arrived he promised reform. He told us he was going to use forward guidance to give markets a clearer steer of where interest rates and monetary policy were going. The first two occasions when he guided people to expect a rate rise he did not follow through with one, and after the third warning of a rate rise after a gap he actually cut rates. It was difficult to see how any of this helped.

During the referendum he politicised the Bank by producing a series of very pessimistic short term forecasts of jobs, unemployment, output and house prices which only Remain could accept. They turned out to be very wrong as I and other Leavers forecast.

After the vote he did nothing. A few weeks later he decided to cut interest rates, relaunch Quantitative easing and make money available to the banks. This stimulated activity and inflation, and pushed the pound down a bit. From 2017 onwards he then changed tack, withdrew necessary facilities from the commercial banks, put through two rate rises and slowed the economy markedly until over the last three months there has been no growth at all. This was needless and predictable.

He could have shifted UK policy in late 2018 to promoting more growth and

activity as the Fed did. He could have done so this autumn when the ECB did. Instead he ignored the obvious signs of global weakness and tightened controls over commercial bank lending. On his watch the repair of the commercial banks has been completed so they are now robust and able to withstand bigger external shocks. They now need an LTRO or funding for lending scheme to access money to lend on to businesses who wish to invest and to people who want to buy homes and cars.