

Meeting with Wokingham Citizens Advice Bureau

I dropped in to our local CAB in Wokingham to thank the volunteers and to see what are the latest issues and worries.

They told me that debt and Council Tax remain lead issues. They asked me to pursue with the Council what more can be done to help with managing Council Tax debt. I welcome the introduction of help sessions by the CAB with a representative of the Council tax collection department of Wokingham Council to assist people who are finding it difficult to meet the bill. Details of these are on the CAB website.

They also alerted me to the growing numbers of cases about family break up which are also reaching them. They can sometimes help with providing more information for people on how divorce proceeds, what might happen over care for the children and other important matters.

The art of the deal

Life requires a series of negotiations. If you are buying a good or service the negotiation with the provider may be over price, quality, specification or other matters. You may start as a buyer with an idea of the service you want and an idea of a low price. The provider may have to explain that the available service is different and dearer.

Sometimes you the buyer recognise that what you thought was on offer is not. You could decide to buy what is on offer, and accept it is dearer, but you are more likely to decide that as what you want is not available it's better to save your money or buy something else.

Other times you reach agreement over the style and quantity of service, and have to strike a compromise over the price. The buyer has to weigh up how much the provider needs the business, and the provider needs to guess how much you want the service. More often than not a bargain is struck, but one or both sides may miscalculate and end up with no deal. If one or other side is unable to walk away from the deal, then they will usually get a bad deal. The other party will exploit their weakness to a greater or lesser extent.

Most people understand this. Many people have bought a house, bought a car, or negotiated with a builder or some other domestic service provider. They have also often walked away from a house or a car as they turned out not to be good deals. They know you walk away unless you really want something, and

that you have to be willing to walk away if you want to keep pressure on for good quality and good value. This makes people all the more frustrated when they see how the UK has not done this in negotiating with the EU. We have seen time and again how the opposition to Brexit in Parliament and in the establishment have constantly been undermining efforts by the UK to pursue a firm line in the negotiations. Mrs May refused to walk away when the EU came up with a very damaging sequencing to the negotiation, giving them all they wanted in the first part, the Withdrawal treaty, and leaving everything the UK might want open until after the first part was signed. She then refused to walk away when the draft Withdrawal Agreement took shape with a huge move to keep our money, keep us under the EU control for longer, and to invent an Irish backstop as a possible means to keep us indefinitely in the customs union and following single market laws. Now some of these same people have decided to cripple the UK's attempt at a renegotiation by ruling out walking away, our best card to get the attention of EU negotiators.

The big advantages we have are manifest. We pay them money, they don't pay us money (net). They sell us far more imports than we sell them. Much more of their trade faces tariffs if we leave with no agreement than we face. We can trade quite successfully under WTO rules, with lower tariffs on fewer products out than in. We can regain control of our money, our laws, our borders and our fish. If only the opposition would let the government negotiate against the possibility of No deal. Armed with such formidable advantages we would have a decent chance of getting them to agree to free trade talks and no new barriers on exit. As it is the EU sniffs weakness and continues to offer nothing in the hope that the opposition will do their work for them. As Mrs May used rightly to say, no deal is better than a bad deal. In this case a lot better as what is on offer is a very bad deal.

Meeting with community representatives against the Bridge Farm planning application

I met with opponents of the Bridge farm quarry today. I confirmed that I am against a quarry in that location, for the reasons set out in the Council's decision on the application. I will be happy to assist the Council in anyway should this matter go to appeal. I will take up with the Council the issue of which sites are identified in their new Minerals Plan to make sure they do not intend to identify this location.

Planning application at Bridge Farm

I am pleased to report that Wokingham Council considered carefully the planning application at bridge Farm and refused permission. Like you I am pleased that they came to this conclusion.

Should the decision be appealed I will support the Council as I promised before the decision.

Who wants an election?

It was curious to see how practically no Opposition MPs wanted a General election when offered the opportunity on Wednesday night.

The SNP probably do want an early election. They think they can improve their current position at Westminster.

Change UK and the Independents do not want an early election. They see from the polls that they are all likely to lose their seats. Of course many of the Independents recently created by their expulsion from the Conservative party will decide to take retirement. Most would probably like this Parliament to last a bit longer before they retire.

The Lib Dems probably think they could make some gains in an election, where they came a good second last time with a Labour vote to squeeze. Yet they have decided to resist the offer so far as they are more wedded to keeping us in the EU than anything else. They are clearly conscious of the weakness of other Remain parties, the ambiguity of the Labour position and the opportunity to annoy the Prime Minister more by refusing an immediate election. They have now said they wish to wait until the October 31 deadline has passed before facing voters. They want the PM to have to ask for a new extension against his wishes, and they may well want a longer extension than the suggested one until the end of January.

The Greens may have a similar position to the Lib Dems. As they do best in similar seats they have a difficult decision to make about whether both should fight all the most likely seats or whether they do a deal over which to contest.

Labour is not in much of a condition to fight an election. It is low in the polls, and deeply divided about what its best course of action would be. What will a Labour Manifesto say about the EU issue? Will it repeat the previous one promising to take us out, with new added language about a deal which only amounts to changing the Political declaration and accepting the Withdrawal Agreement? Will they sketch a possible Agreement which the EU of course may

well reject? Will they demand that whatever deal is agreed is subject to a referendum vote on a Remain or deal choice? Will they just ask for a second referendum to try to get the public to change their minds? It seems likely that they will avoid anything too precise, with language that permits some to believe they will try to do a deal and others to think they will concentrate on a second vote. This will still leave a lot of their Midlands and Northern pro Leave seats vulnerable to parties that believe in Brexit.

Some on the Remain side think all these parties need an understanding to put together some kind of Remain platform and avoid too many contests where they oppose each other. It seems unlikely this will work. Labour will be very reluctant to come out clearly for Remain given the voting base in many of their current seats and given the studied ambiguity of the leadership for some time. Without Labour as part of any understanding an important part of this vote base would not be part of any deal. In Scotland it would be especially difficult to arrange an SNP/Labour agreement, just as Greens and Lib Dems are too close for comfort making a deal difficult.