

What you want to read about

I have had some criticism for writing about environmental issues. Looking at the blog stats you found habitats as uninteresting as the Withdrawal Agreement. The two most commented on recent blogs were the one on how to have a more prosperous UK out of the EU, and what laws we should change on exit. A good number of readers are interested in waste and plastics.

This is different to the volume of emails I get as an MP, where environmental ones greatly exceed Brexit ones. Most of them are copies of lobby group emails which people want to route on.

I will continue to write about a range of relevant topics. Those who are only interested in Brexit will find regular update posts they can respond to.

Tax cuts for all

Tax is a necessary evil. We need substantial revenues to run a government and to provide decent public services. The UK believes in state payment for most people's health care and school education, whilst we need police, armed forces and intelligence services to help keep us safe. We also need to send money to those who cannot earn enough to support themselves and their families to an acceptable standard.

There is a common thread amongst politicians to want to use tax as a means of changing or controlling people's behaviour. Many favour so called sin taxes, imposing taxes on drinking alcohol, smoking or eating too much sugar, as a means of changing diets, ending smoking and cutting down on alcohol consumption. Government often is pulled both ways with such taxes. They both want high revenues from them to afford public services, and claim to want lower taxes as people cut out the sinful product. This reinforces the idea that taxes are bad news.

There is also common thread of redistribution in tax plans. Many politicians want to tax the rich because they do not want them to be so rich. The problem with this approach is it can act as a disincentive to behaviours which politicians usually claim to back. Taxes on the rich can become taxes on hard work, on saving, on investing, on building a business or on backing a good idea. Taken to excess taxes on the rich drive the seriously rich out of the country, demotivate the not so rich and create an atmosphere hostile to enterprise.

The UK currently has a very complex tax system, and high rates on various conducts. There is a high rate of tax on those who dare to invest in residential property, high taxes on motorists, on people who earn higher

salaries and on buying a home in expensive parts of the country.

We need a tax simplification, and a move to lower rates. Working hard or buying a home should not be seen as a sin that needs curbing but as a free choice the government is relaxed about. People who set up businesses, take risks and create jobs should be particularly welcome, not objects of suspicion by the tax authorities.

This is why I continue to press government to have an early economy boosting budget that includes tax cuts. Income tax, Stamp Duty , VED and VAT cuts are much needed to boost our homes market, car market and to leave people more of their own money to spend.

Tackling plastic waste in the oceans

David Attenborough's Blue Planet II has done much to focus public attention on the birds, sea mammals and turtles which die every year from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste. I have received numerous emails about it so will share here my reply to the campaign email.

More than eight million tonnes of plastic enter the world's seas each year. For sea birds and larger marine creatures, the danger comes from being entangled in plastic bags and other debris, or mistaking plastic for food. Larger pieces of plastic can also damage the digestive system of animals and can be potentially fatal.

In the UK alone, during its recent Great British Beach Clean Up, the Marine Conservation Society found 718 pieces of litter for every 100 metre stretch of beach surveyed, and of this rubbish from food and drink made up at least one fifth.

If I buy a food product in plastic packaging because it is a fluid which needs containment it does not end up in the oceans. I dispose of it through the local Council who get it recycled, or burned for energy from waste, or dumped to landfill. The plastic in the oceans comes from people deliberately discarding plastic waste as litter.

The Government recognises the danger that plastic waste poses to marine life and has taken significant steps to tackle this by seeking to reduce the amount of plastic packaging people might be able to throw away carelessly. It has introduced a ban on plastic microbeads and taken 9 billion plastic bags out of circulation with the carrier-bag charge. It realises that more needs to be done to protect our environment from the blight of plastic pollution and it has recently launched a consultation around deposit reward and return schemes for plastic bottles and other drinks containers. The Government also plans to ban the sale of plastic straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds.

Responding to the public mood , seven major supermarket chains have announced they will make drastic reductions in plastic use over the next five years. Much current plastic packaging would be replaced with paper and pulp trays and paper bags, which would be recyclable through domestic waste collections or in-store recycling facilities. It can only be a matter of time before other supermarket chains follow suit.

The Government recognises that tackling the use of plastic cannot be done in isolation. It is directing some of its development spending to help developing nations reduce plastic waste, increasing our own marine protected areas at home, and establishing new Blue Belt protections in our Overseas Territories.

We need to stress it is not just the responsibility of the Government to care for the environment. We must all do our part by using the litter bins, taking our own reusable bags to the shops and reducing the use of throwaway plastic items.

The challenge is to stop people on boats treating the seas as their waste bin and to stop people on land throwing plastic away where it can be caught by the wind or a river and sent to the ocean. We also wish to stop people littering the countryside, so waste does not reach the oceans or pollute areas where wildlife lives.

It is up to all of us to encourage and persuade our friends and family to avoid littering and to report or discourage others we see who are throwing litter away carelessly. We also have to work internationally on the problem as most of the litter in the oceans does not come from the UK.

Parliament must play its part to contribute towards reducing plastic waste. Parliament recently announced a comprehensive range of steps to drastically reduce its consumption of single-use plastics this year by switching non-recyclable disposal items such as take-away boxes, cups and soup containers to sustainably sourced, plant-based and certified compostable alternatives. Bottled water in plastic bottles will also no longer be on sale in Parliament, eliminating 120,000 plastic bottles annually.

What do you think we should all do to curb the plastic threat to the seas?

We will leave the EU on 31 October

Some have doubts we will leave the EU on the date stated by the PM.

There are many good reasons why he has to stick to it.

1. The EU has made clear it will not re open the Withdrawal Agreement and offer the 21 to 45 months delay in leaving without the Irish backstop.

2. The EU is not offering talks on delay in exit without the Withdrawal Treaty.

3. A significant number of Conservative MPs would not vote for the Withdrawal Treaty without the backstop as it contains many other undesirable features.

4. Labour shows no wish to go into coalition with pro EU Conservative Ministers should the government want to change its mind on this central policy, to get through a Withdrawal Treaty which delays and undermines Brexit.

5 Even this Parliament would not vote to revoke Article 50 and then repeal the leaving legislation, recognising that would be a provocation too far of the majority who want Brexit.

The best course remains for the UK to leave on 31 October as promised, whilst offering comprehensive free trade talks and a no tariffs exit on that date.

Saving habitats

Some write to me asking that we do more to save habitats and help species survive. As an animal lover I am all in favour of doing what we can to help, and certainly avoiding doing harm to the other species we share the planet with.

We need to understand that to succeed a species need protection from predators and a decent food supply. Species are adaptable, and will respond to human changes in the landscape. We should not seek to fossilise our lives for fear of disrupting the balances, but make sure as we change our lives there are answers for the species around us. Nor should we think that mankind is all powerful and is in some unique position, able to judge the struggle for life and determine all the winners and losers under the process of natural selection.

Some species thrive because human conduct changes. Just look at the success of seagulls as birds now often living well away from the coast. Many of them have traded the hard work and uncertainty of fishing offshore for the easier pickings of a local tip, park or source of food from human contact. Urban foxes know the way to earn a living around the dustbins and discards of human society. Birds flourish in our gardens where many people offer them special meals, and where the human hunter/predator has been replaced by the bird watcher and lover.

Anyone worried about various insects or small mammals can create the kind of habitat they like in their own gardens. Many do. The advance of urban development will remove some natural habitats on the way, but there remains plenty of wild areas, woodlands and parklands where animals can thrive. Some

interventions to protect a species requires tough action to reduce or harm a predator.

There is no golden age of animals to restore or some pre ordained balance to be struck. There used to be many more horses because people reared and fed them so they could work for the people who provided for them. Various species from cats and dogs to horses and farm animals have adapted to live alongside humans, whilst more so called wild species are now at one remove adapting to life close to people. Many summer cafes are much attended by small birds with a love of cake.