

Chips with everything

Under the new tier 2, much of the country will only be able to buy a drink in a pub or cafe if at the same time they order a meal. This policy of chips with everything is causing concerns about how many pubs and other hospitality venues will close down for good as a result. Tiers 2 and 3 with its more severe closures represent additional erosion of the High Street and more heartache for owners and employees of catering based business. A Parliament which has often campaigned to save pubs and Town Centres is edging towards more policies that destroy both.

There is a wider concern that I have set out before. Can we have a better vision than the idea that we suffer one bad lockdown only to have a brief respite before another. This time indeed many places face a tougher continuing lockdown with a different name and different criteria immediately after a national lockdown.

The government is having trouble persuading its MPs to back this latest redrawing of the map and rejigging of detailed controls over our lives. Many Conservative MPs are demanding more information on how the decisions are made over which Tier a place is in, over which controls and rules might have some beneficial impact upon the progress of the virus, over how much collateral damage will be done to other health care issues, how much economic damage will be done, and how a place gets out of the higher tiers.

This may turn out to be first angry responses, to be assuaged by better information later. It may be a more serious challenge to the whole base of the policy. I have heard MPs ask many detailed and searching questions, with no signs so far of compelling answers.

It turns out there is considerable judgement involved in putting a place into Tier 2 or 3, despite the generally expressed wish for it be more data driven. Whilst we are told there are five sets of figures they look at to do with case numbers, rates of change and NHS capacity, they admit they also look at Travel to Work areas and make assumptions about future developments.

There is great concern that many places have just lived through the national lockdown, only to find themselves allocated to a higher tier than before. Doesn't that mean the national lockdown failed for them? There is little explanation of the true compliance rate with the rules, or of how the scientific modellers expect compliance to develop given the longevity of these measures and the sense of lack of progress their latest proposals have generated. It appears Ministers recommended a long Christmas break with permitted travel in response to polling, which was then used by the advisers to demand more lockdown for longer as offset for the Christmas relaxation.

Many pose the issue as one of seeking a balance between measures which control the virus and measures which allow jobs and activity to flourish. We need to move on to find solutions to both the pandemic and the need for economic recovery based on best policies for each issue, without having so

many policies which favour one at cost to the other. I will be pursuing again the options that can help protect us whilst keeping open more hospitality, entertainment and travel, and asking more about the capacity of the NHS and the forecasts of the government advisers.