

Clean air

I'm all in favour of clean air. The Clean Air Acts which removed the smogs from London and our leading industrial cities were great acts of progress. They did not damage our economy, whilst improving the quality of life and saving our lungs.

Today more can be done. Particulate matter in the air can be unpleasant. It comes from domestic and commercial heating systems, from transport, from power generation and from some industrial processes. Progressively higher standards of pollution control can clean our air more.

There has been a tendency in the UK debate to concentrate on the impact of the car and lorry, and to minimise or ignore the role of other sources. It is true there has been quite strenuous efforts to clean the output from factory chimneys. There has been a strong move away from open fires and coal and coke burning boilers. Their replacement with oil or gas systems has lowered the output of hazardous waste. There has been less concentration on the particulates coming from diesel buses and trains.

The government will be long on words and targets, but more careful on proposing changes to the way individuals live. You cannot suddenly demand that everyone replaces their domestic boiler or scraps their coal or wood burning devices. Effecting change in the hearths and boiler cupboards of the nation's homes requires patient progress and incentives to encourage voluntary change. Requiring people to burn less harmful fuel in solid fuel devices would be possible. Banning bonfires is part of modern life.

The state should look to its own. There are still cities where bus fumes and particulate matter from the exhaust are an important part of the problem on the streets, especially near bus stops. There are stations where waiting trains keep their diesel engines running, with smoke and particulates circulating in high concentrations by the platforms. There are many public buildings with inefficient and dirty heating systems. Improvement and change in these areas would be the most positive way the government could lead this change.

Amy Redwood

I have to bring sad news. My Mother Amy had a severe stroke on Thursday evening, and died overnight in hospital.

I will provide more details for her friends when things are sorted out.

UK Net debt down by £18.5bn

The ONS had to admit today that it had overstated Public Sector Net Debt excluding banks by £18.5bn in past figures. £11bn of this was an error, and £7.5bn comes from updated figures. It is all part of a pattern of too much official gloom about our economic and financial position.

Last year to end March 2018 total additional state borrowing came in at £40.5bn, compared to the March budget forecast in 2017 of £58.3 bn. So that forecast was overstated by almost £18 bn.

Given these much better figures the Treasury needs to ask itself some questions about its spending and taxing policies, and ask why the official forecasts and figures find it so difficult to track what is going on.

Data Protection and constituents queries

I have asked my office to be fully compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation.

We will pass information on to public bodies or other counterparties involved in a complaint or query when a constituent writes in. We will regard the submission of the complaint or query as consent to this. We will keep a record of that query and response usually for the life of the Parliament in case of follow up issues, and will update constituents as appropriate on that topic.

Where the data sent is particularly sensitive, as with details on medical conditions and treatment, we will usually request express permission to share this with the other bodies involved.

We have always sought to handle people's data well and to respect confidentiality. We have to trust government, local government and their Agencies to do the same when we pass on information to seek to resolve an issue.

We have also often have to point out that I cannot act on a case affecting someone's adult relative without the express permission of the person affected. I understand why people often want to intervene for their adult children or for their parents, but unless they have power of attorney I do need to ask for consent from the person at the centre of the complaint or

query. If a power of attorney is involved then my office need to see the written record of it. Where the relative is living in another constituency it will usually be necessary to refer them to the MP for that constituency, whilst I am happy to take up all such issues affecting people living in my constituency, even if they have been initiated by a relative living elsewhere. I will always need the consent of my constituent.

Trade wars

The USA has temporarily suspended the tariffs it threatened to deploy against China. Apparently the trade talks are making progress. China accepts that the balance of payments surplus it enjoys with the USA is excessive, and wishes to help the USA find more ways to sell to China. Some of this requires market opening by China of a general kind, and some requires more successful US exporting relative to say Germany of products China already imports.

China is a heavy importer of transport goods, engineered products and technology. The USA is wishing to be more cautious about how much technology she sells, given worries about the way China has handled Intellectual Property in the past. Boeing will be hoping a new trade deal strengthens their hand against Airbus, and the US car makers will be wishing to do better against Mercedes and BMW.

The UK should win from some of the changes envisaged. China accepts she needs to liberalise her banking and financial services markets more, which could assist the UK as well as the US. We too have a substantial trade deficit with China.

I assume Mr Trump would prefer to find some common ground and show he has a "win". So far China seems to understand and accept this, and is busy trying to find ways in which the US can do a bit better. China can argue that her policy is to liberalise progressively anyway, as she has been doing at a slow pace since joining the WTO. Accepting the idea that the trade gap must narrow a lot is one thing, but bringing about the day to day reality of more US exports or fewer US imports is still going to take time and will be difficult to deliver.