

## Fill the potholes

In one of my regular review meetings with the Chief Executive of Wokingham Borough Council last week I raised the issue of potholes again.

I asked her to make sure the policy of the government and the Councillors to get the potholes filled is carried out. I lobbied the government for extra money, and the government did announce additional monies for Councils including Wokingham and West Berkshire specifically for potholes, on top of the annual sums sent for road maintenance. I reported this at the time on this website. I do not know of any Councillor seeking to block this.

We know the Council has some money for this purpose, so will they please spend it on a clear priority of the public.

---

## Technology at the border

I cannot believe that Remain and their media friends are still going on about how goods move across borders. The UK government last year set out how technology can ensure smooth passage of goods. Now we are being told this would all take time to develop and set up. I have good news for them. It is all old hat, and is up and running for non EU trade already. Firms running just in time supply chains for components into the UK have no problems with components entering from outside the EU at the moment, despite the alleged tariff and non tariff barriers to trade that exist for non EU trade today. If all our trade becomes non EU trade after March, what is the problem? We know how to handle it.

I have more good news for firms worried about this. Inbound goods for their factories in the UK have to clear UK customs, not EU customs to enter the UK. There is no need and no plan I know of to impose new barriers at our borders when we leave the EU that will detain lorries and cause unacceptable delays. It is in our own hands.

Let me try again, as one who has imported and exported from a UK industrial base. There are already electronic manifests for each consignment, allowing fast passage across a border as the authorities know what is in the truck or container. There is a trusted trader scheme allowing electronic filing to replace manual document inspection. Any VAT, Excise or tariff due can be deducted electronically away from the frontier to settle the bills. This also happens today for our EU trade, as our frontier with the rest of the EU is already a VAT, Excise and currency border.

The so called Irish border problem is a put up job by the EU trying to make life difficult. The government should tell them we will use current methods

to deal with border issues after we have left. These include today anti smuggling police and revenue activities on both sides of the Irish border, and police co-operation over criminals seeking to move from one country to another. If the EU continues to make heavy weather of this the government should say we will not be paying them any extra money after March 2019 when we leave.

---

## Visit to the Station Tap – alias the Molly Millar

Yesterday I was invited to meet the Area Manager of the Stonegate Pub Company, to view the changes they have made to the former Molly Millar near Wokingham station.

I did meet the local Manager who showed me the new facilities and told me they are now trading successfully following the re opening. The pub has been renamed the Station Tap to remind people that it is opposite the station, and now has a door on the side facing the trains. It has a range of food, hot and soft drinks as well as the usual range of alcoholic drinks. Some of the new trade comes from people arriving home at the station, or wanting something to eat and drink before catching a train in the morning. They are open from 7 am for breakfast, and have extended opening until 2.30 am with sports tv and various weekly events.

If you are going by car remember to take £2 for the car park, as you have to pay to stay but there are reclaim arrangements if you buy drinks. The driver better stick to the coffee.

---

## The future of grammar schools

Two Reading based grammars provide places for pupils from my constituency. These are popular with parents. The comprehensives also attract talented pupils, so the sixth forms of the local comprehensives can also provide a good A level education and offer a platform for gaining places at top universities for those who are academically inclined. As a result I have not encountered jealousy of the grammars on the doorsteps from those whose children just missed out on a grammar place. There are clearly too few grammar school places for all the able children who might like to attend.

The government has now said it will make some additional money available to

expand grammar places at those schools who would like to do so. This seems to me unremarkable, as around Wokingham we need to expand the number of schools places in general to keep up with demands from all the new housing with many more people moving into the area. If we are going to carry on with grammars amongst the choices open to parents and pupils, we should allow them to expand if they wish.

I would be interested to hear your views on this latest development. Selection still seems to evoke strong criticism in some quarters, though most seem to accept the need for selection when it comes to university places. It is also easier to teach well if pupils are streamed or grouped in schools, as different ability and effort levels require different instruction. In the adult world there is a lot of selection, with professional qualifications and competitions for top jobs being a feature of business life.

The good news is it is often the individuals who did not compete strongly for academic laurels who go on to be the most successful entrepreneurs and sports personalities. Life is full of challenges and competitions, so there are prizes for all sorts of exertion and skill. Getting into a grammar does not guarantee long term success. Not getting into a grammar does not stop success and a good career.

---

## Mr Willetts wants to penalise savings and home ownership

The Resolution Foundation has come up with a cruel blockbuster this time in its efforts to create an intergenerational war in the UK. They argue that older people have too much of the country's wealth, and recommend taxing pensions and homes much more to pass the money on to younger people.

They ignore the obvious point that in all past generations older people have more of the wealth than younger people. Most of us start out with no assets. You work up to buying a home of your own on a mortgage, and start to put savings away for rainy days, and gradually build up a pension pot. As people now live longer they may spend many years in retirement, so they need a substantial level of savings to see them through their remaining years.

Most bizarre is the Foundation's idea that many older people have done well out of house price rises. Most people just own the home they live in. As most wish to carry on living in it, they cannot use the gains they have made for some other purpose. The people who ultimately gain are the younger people or the charities who inherit the money on death.

Worse still is the Foundation's prescription to deal with this misinterpreted problem. They want to charge people more for living in their own home if it has gone up in value – £2.3bn more for the country as a whole. They want to

charge people extra tax on their pensions in payment, placing an NI charge on top of their Income tax on the pension receipt! They want to impose more NI on any earnings people add to their pension.

You do not make the young rich by making the older poor. Tackling some poverty in old age has been a success story, so why now go back on it and try to impoverish the prudent? I agree with them that we can and should do more to help young people with home purchase and with university fees.

Trying to pit one generation against another is unpleasant politics. In many families there is a spirit of mutual help between the generations. Where parents and grandparents have surplus savings they do often help young people to pay their way through education or to acquire their first home.