

Wokingham Town Centre comes to life

Yesterday Wokingham was in better spirits with the sun shining. The Marketplace was busy, with the Courtyard restaurant doing a good trade. The new Cook shop opened with many visiting to see the range of prepared meals on offer for home cooking. The sooner Peach Place is fully opened, the better. It was a pleasure to have free parking so I did not need to worry about long I was staying.

A response to the EDM on climate change

The UK has been one of biggest cutters of carbon dioxide emissions worldwide. Since 1990 UK carbon emissions are down by 43% compared to a target of 40%. The UK met its first carbon budget in 2008-12 and outperformed targets in the second budget 2013-17. All looks good for outperforming again in the current budget up to 2022. In contrast Germany was only trying to get 40% below 1990 by 2020 but is a long way off hitting that target, last seen only 27% below. German carbon output is more than twice the UK's. China and the USA are the two largest worldwide contributors.

If we look at carbon dioxide per head the USA at 15.7 , Germany at 9.7, China at 7.7, Russia at 12.3 and the EU average at 7.0 are all well above the UK at 5.7. This is a global issue which needs global policies. The UK is active in pressing for international targets and agreements. It makes little sense for one country to cut back if others do not, and even less sense if a country like the UK cuts back on its own use of energy for production and transport, only to import items that are energy intensive from elsewhere. It is bad for UK jobs and the balance of payments if we uniquely have dear energy that prices industry out of the UK.

The UK government claims to be the greenest ever, and has put a lot of effort into technological alternatives to encourage fuel saving and substitution. The EDM does not recognise any of this. It does ask the government to make more money available for a "green deal". I would need to know how much is being sought and how it is proposed it should be spent. I am always happy to support initiatives to promote fuel saving and would be willing to look at further good suggestions. We need to avoid initiatives that do not make overall net reductions, or destroy jobs and create fuel poverty.

As the EDM says, the good news is we all have access to technology which means we can make a difference ourselves. Ultimately it is about how we all live our own lives. I have taken action to curb draughts and heat loss at home. I try to buy locally sourced food as it makes little sense to bring in food from the continent by ferry or airfreight when we can grow it nearby. I have improved my heating controls and heat my home to lower average

temperatures by flexing the temperature to my use of the rooms. I have proposed removing VAT on all green products once we are out of the EU and allowed to do so, as I want better draught excluders, insulation materials and control systems to be cheaper and more accessible. The public is keen to see cleaner air by setting higher standards on particulates and smoke, and to pursue commonsense policies to promote better insulation, greater fuel efficiency and fewer food miles. It is also important for individuals to choose to limit family size if they care about the demands on planetary resources. The UK rightly does not favour any government controls on such matters in the way China did for many years. Governments can help create a climate where people self impose sensible limits on population growth in the interests of sustainability and limiting demands on resources, and can control migration levels.

Good Friday in Wokingham

I attended All Saints Church this morning for the ecumenical Good Friday service. The congregation then walked to Market Place to hear the Easter production.

This year's play was a well crafted reminder of the life and work of Jesus, and the significance of his death on the cross. The play stressed the Christian values of including everyone, rich and poor, successful and unsuccessful, fit and sick, and of showing sympathy and tolerance to all. It was a powerful piece drawing on some of the best lines from the New Testament. The Sermon on the Mount was a central text, and memories of some of the miracles performed reinforced the idea that people should extend love and understanding to each other.

It was a timely message , with a decent seized audience there to appreciate it.

The latest polls should warn the two main parties in the Commons to avoid a European election.

The latest poll for the possible European elections shows Labour on just 22% and the Conservatives on a new low of 15%. The two main parties in the current Commons commanded 82.4% of the vote between them in June 2017. Then both parties promised to implement the decision of UK voters to leave the EU. By making that important promise many UKIP voters returned to the two main

parties. The Conservatives hoovered up Eurosceptic votes and Labour attracted left wing votes from people who had often not voted before. Labour kept a lot of its Leave voters in the Midlands and the North by promising to leave. The two parties have lost 55% of their vote according to the latest poll, and will struggle to get it back for the Euro election.

The votes have gone to parties clearly committed to an early Brexit on the one hand, and to parties wishing to abandon Brexit on the other. The pro Brexit parties are on 34% of the vote, and the anti Brexit parties on 29%

Brexit party 27% Greens 10%

UKIP 7% Lib Dems 9%

Change 6%

SNP/Plaid 4%

Total 34% Total 29%

It is difficult to see how a Euro election could be other than a verdict on how and when to get out of the EU. The indecision by Conservatives and Labour over this very issue has led to their collapse in the polls, as many voters have come to doubt their stated intention at the last election to get us out in good time.

My advice to the government remains the same. Announce you are cancelling the Euro elections and leave without signing the Withdrawal Agreement. We can leave on 22 May under the extension agreement. Offer talks on a free trade agreement for the day after we leave.

Looking at these polls were Mr Corbyn and Mrs May to do a deal to put the Withdrawal Agreement through they could avoid the Euro elections that way. The problem with that approach is as described yesterday. The Withdrawal Treaty entails binding us back into the EU, meaning both parties have a great deal of explaining to do as to why they have committed to it. Both parties would continue to suffer in the national polls from uniting to push through a much disliked Treaty that does not allow us to take back control of our laws, our money and our borders any time soon ,and does not agree terms for our eventual possible departure from the EU. They are also leaving it very late to get the complex and unpopular legislation through Parliament against a determined minority opposing it all the way.

It is strange to watch two leaders fixated by such an unpopular Treaty and willing to preside over such a huge collapse in their party's vote owing to failure to do as promised in the summer of 2017.

Mr Corbyn's dilemma

Over the next two weeks Mr Corbyn can determine the fate of Mrs May's EU Agreement. If he placed a three line whip on Labour MPs to vote for the legislation necessary to bind the UK into this new Treaty, he would give Mrs May enough votes to secure the matter. There might well be more Conservative

rebels against such legislation, but not enough to prevent a grand coalition of Mr Corbyn and his loyalists with Mrs May and her government appointees putting through the necessary law. So far Mr Corbyn has been unwilling to do this, even though Labour has not made much of a case against the terms of the so called Withdrawal Agreement. We saw the kind of votes we could expect in such circumstances on the vote about the latest delay to our exit. Delay won by 400 to 120, with only 133 Conservatives voting for the delay despite a three line whip to do so.

Instead Mr Corbyn has concentrated on criticising the attached Political declaration. Understandably he has argued that signing the Withdrawal terms does not place the UK in a good position to secure the kind of eventual exit from the EU that he and others would like. He has placed considerable emphasis on his wish to see the UK stay in a customs union with the EU, though he has also hinted that he would still like some independent trade policy. It is difficult to see how these two usually incompatible positions could be negotiated with the EU. He has also made it official Labour policy in certain circumstances to have a second referendum to endorse any Agreement, though he seems more flexible about this than the Blairite wing of his followers.

Mr Corbyn now has to recognise that Mrs May could end up conceding the customs union. If she has her way and puts indicative votes to the Commons again, the customs union proposal without a Conservative whip on to oppose might get through. It has been voted down several times before because it was Conservative policy in the last election to oppose it, and because 3 line whips were placed against it. It would only take a handful of Conservative rebels against the Manifesto to tip over the vote, assuming all opposition parties coalesced around the proposal. Mrs May would probably then change her own mind and recommend the customs union.

This could place Mr Corbyn in a more difficult position. Why would he wish to take responsibility for the Withdrawal Treaty and for rescuing Mrs May's government? Why would he hand her a big win, finally vindicating her tenacious support for a Treaty which is opposed by a big majority of the public? More Labour than Conservatives might end up voting for the legislation it needed. He still has a couple more options. He can argue that he dislikes other features of the proposal as well as the absence of the customs union to avoid commitment. He could help her win the first vote but then find detail in the legislation he could not support, creating subsequent chaos amidst allegations of bad faith.

The way out appeared to be to rewrite the Political declaration, as the EU used to say there was some flexibility about that document. That seems to be closed off by the tough terms of the recent extension, where they categorically rule out any further discussions of the future partnership until the Withdrawal Treaty is adopted in UK law.

Mr Corbyn's safest course is to find another reason why he cannot bring himself to back this Treaty, He has been talking about worries over who the next leader of the Conservatives might be, what kind of future partnership the Conservatives would want to negotiate, what trade deals they might do

elsewhere and other related matters. He could even start to expose some of the undesirable features of the Agreement. Were he to give the government support not just for the first vote but to get through a very contentious and important piece of constitutional legislation to enforce the new Treaty he might unleash uncontrollable forces amongst his own voters and members. The curse of the Agreement might gravely damage his party. This is a draft Treaty which unites many Leave and Remain voters in opposition to it. Labour MPs in Leave voting seats would be particularly uncomfortable, whilst the left would make unusual supporters of Mrs May.

The worst outcome for Labour would be securing a second referendum. The party would then become a pro Remain party and lose most of its Leave voters. It would be scorned by at least half the electorate as anti democratic for going back on its word to accept the result of the original referendum. It would need to defend its new found enthusiasm for all things EU including its austerity economics.