

Getting Wokingham on the move

Over this summer of road closures and temporary traffic lights Councillors have assured me that the plan is to get the works finished during the school holidays so people can get around more easily again when they both have to take children to school and get themselves to work in the morning and to get home in the late afternoon. I have just written again to the Council asking them to remove temporary lights and take blocks away from closed traffic lanes in good time for the return to school wherever they can. We have experienced troubles with prominent junctions like the Winnersh Crossroads, the Finchampstead/Wellington Road roundabout and with the closure of Denmark Street and Broad Street in Wokingham, town centre.

The UK renews EU trade agreements for post Brexit

One of the many lies of Remain was the claim we would lose all the trade agreements the EU has managed to negotiate. Yesterday the government signed the carry over of the EU Partnership agreements with six African countries. Would all those who wrote in to this site and said this would not happen now like to apologise.

Signing the EU Withdrawal Agreement would be bad news. Leaving without signing it would be good news.

The Prime Minister was scarcely overwhelming in her support for Brexit, which remains her most distinctive core policy, when she said leaving without a deal would not be the end of the world. Let's have another go at explaining the reality.

There is no agreed deal on the table for the UK's "future partnership" in the way she wants. Indeed Mr Macron has just poured more cold water on the Chequers proposals, which are not going to emerge as an agreement. What is on offer is an almost completed EU Withdrawal Agreement which is heavily one sided, giving the EU much of what it wants. It delays Brexit for us and

burdens the UK with a huge and needless bill which we are under no legal obligation to pay unless we sign to do so.

So here's my advice. The UK government should be positive and release the new policies on fishing, farming, migration, and trade that could add to our growth rate and prosperity, using the freedoms leaving gives us. Above all the Treasury should cheer up and tell us how they are going to spend the £329bn they have in the budget to give away to the EU. Spend that on tax cuts and public services at home and that's a great 2% boost to our output and incomes, which we could enjoy over the next two to three years.

Signing a Withdrawal Agreement to give continuing overseas aid to a group of rich countries on the continent will leave us poorer. Let's hear the Treasury calculations of how much economic damage is done by the large payments abroad, and by the large balance of payments deficit we run with the EU under present rules. It's high time they did a calculation of the additional costs and losses brought to the UK by EU membership. Let's also have a new tariff schedule which works for the UK, allowing us to narrow the deficit and do more at home to supply our needs. The single market has not been good for our trade balance or for our big parts of our industry.

Wokingham Conservatives lunch on Sunday 26 August

There was plenty to talk about when Conservative members assembled for a summer lunch last week-end. We reviewed progress with getting more money for Wokingham's schools, social care and road improvements. We talked to Councillors present about the need to re open the roads in time for the return to school and the end of many people's summer breaks. And yes, the topic of Brexit did come up.

No-one present spoke up for the Chequers proposal. The majority view was to press the Prime Minister to move on from Chequers, and to see what kind of free trade deal might be possible. This was not a formal political event with votes or decisions, but it was interesting to see such a broad measure of agreement from a good audience. There was a general wish for the UK to be firmer in negotiation and to talk more about the benefits of leaving.

Two questions for farmers to take

advantage of Brexit

UK agriculture- and fisheries – has been one of the most heavily managed sectors by the EU and one of the most damaged. We have moved from being a net exporter of fish to be a net importer, despite having the best fishing grounds in the EU. We have lost substantial market share in temperate foodstuffs despite having a good climate and soils to grow our own.

As we move to leaving the EU without a Withdrawal Agreement we need to ask what tariffs we should impose on world exports of food to us, including food from the EU. If we simply impose current EU tariff levels on the EU as well when we leave to meet the obligation for common tariffs on our complete worldwide trade, there would be a substantial tariff barrier against items like Danish bacon, French cheese and Irish beef which would give the UK a huge boost to produce more for ourselves. The tariff revenue we collected as our industry adjusts to its ability to displace imports should of course be given back to consumers as tax cuts so we are not worse off.

Does UK agriculture think we should impose the full EU tariffs against the EU, or should we take advantage of putting new tariffs on EU product to lower the overall tariff on world food generally so some of the benefit is given direct to consumers of non EU food? For example, we could remove all tariffs on food we cannot produce for ourselves. Why not abolish the EU 16% tariff on oranges from outside the EU? Some say we should simply impose the full tariffs. Some say we should impose a lower average tariff on temperate food. Either way there will be a boost to domestic output. I will return to the issue of our tariff schedule in a later post, but would like to know your views.

So my second question to UK farmers is what plans are there to step up your output after March 29 2019? How quickly can we grow extra tomatoes, vegetables and the other items that pour in from Spain and the Netherlands at the moment? How much more cheese and yoghurt can you produce to regain market share from the continent? Are there plans to expand beef and pork production when we get the price advantage any new tariffs will bring?

I will be sending a version of this to the NUFU to hear their comments.