

One cheer for the OBR



John Redwood won a free place at Kent College, Canterbury, He graduated from Magdalen College Oxford, has a DPhil and is a fellow of All Souls College. A businessman by background, he has been a director of NM Rothschild merchant bank and chairman of a quoted industrial PLC.

- [Read more about John Redwood](#)

Utilities and street works

I met Thames Water today. They liked the idea that pipes and cables ought to be placed in a conduit adjacent to the highway but not under a main road, to avoid having to dig up the road and close it every time they need to maintain, mend or improve the system. They agreed that with new development it would be particularly easy to route utilities away from the main roads and to have them in a common carrier with controlled access, and that where replacements are being deployed there is also scope to reduce the amount going under main roads. I look forward to more progress.

Tariffs and trade

Tariffs can be damaging to trade. That is why I want us out of the EU customs union, because it imposes high tariffs on lower income countries wishing to sell us better value food. I want us to be able to negotiate a lower overall tariff package for ourselves than the EU wishes to do with the rest of the world. It is particularly foolish and unfriendly to levy high tariffs on food we cannot grow for ourselves because it comes from a non EU country.

I find it curious that the EU claims to be scandalised by Mr Trump threatening a 10% tariff on German cars which sell in large numbers into the US, when the EU itself imposes just such a 10% tariff on US cars into the EU. Germany runs a colossal trade surplus with both the UK, inside the EU tariff wall, and with the US, outside the tariff wall. Mr Trump identifies the

asymmetric tariffs and some other barriers as one of the reasons the trade is so lop sided, and wishes to do something about it.

Meanwhile it is typical of the EU that they are telling the UK that we cannot exempt ourselves from the US steel tariffs, though we would probably be in a good position to do so on our own. It is reminder of why we need to get on with our exit so we do have control over these matters. I also read that the EU is still pursuing tax cases against us and argues that we owe them E2.7bn of underclaimed customs dues which the UK Treasury contests. We have lost a lot of revenue before from EU tax cases and now have to argue against making yet another additional payment to a body we are leaving. Clearly they think we should be levying higher tariffs on non EU imports than we think are owing because they wish to keep these products out, and to harm UK consumers.

This is not the wonderful free trade EU some think we must stay in at all costs.

How about some new subjects for media interviews about Brexit ?

The mainstream media seems to have got lost in repeats on their news and comment shows. Every day is Groundhog day. They do the Irish border story, the various alleged barriers to trade stories, and various sectors at possible risk stories. Most of it fans baseless fears or perpetuates misunderstandings of what the current position is and how WTO works. It usually assumes both that the EU will be out to damage their trade with us, and that they will have the power to do so even though we are no longer under their jurisdiction!

If they wish to do a Brexit story every day when there is precious little news in these very slow moving negotiations. I have some thoughts on some new topics that many of us would be interested in. They could also provide a bit of balance.

Let's ask the various parties how they would like to spend the Brexit bonus, the £12bn we will save when we are finally out. And let's have some discussion on whether we should pay the EU additional money after 29 March 2019, and if so why and for how long.

Let's look at our options for designing a much better fishing policy for the UK once after March 2019 we have taken back control of our waters and fish stocks. How much more fish could we land in the UK and sell at home or for export, whilst doing a better job than the CFP has done on conserving stocks, owing to discards.

Let's get on with debating a modern UK farming policy, with an emphasis on

how much more food we can grow for ourselves as we used to before entering the CAP.

Let's discuss which are the best prospects for new trade deals around the world, and will the government ensure we can sign these quickly once out of the EU?

The government is rarely asked about its leaving preparations, and the Opposition rarely asked about what it wants the country to do with its new freedoms once out.

A new migration policy

Many people in the UK would like to see a better balance between supply and demand for homes. Houses are dear in many parts of the country, rents are high and people struggle to get on the housing ladder as owners.

Many people would also like congestion on the roads reduced so they could get their children to school and themselves to work and back more easily each day.

Many want our air to be cleaner, and for the UK to make a bigger contribution to reducing pollution.

We all want our power and water supplies to be good enough for all conditions, at a time when our capacity in both is quite constrained.

A new migration policy in line with the governments own aims and targets would make a contribution to all of these aspirations. If we welcomed in fewer economic migrants each year, limiting the numbers eligible to take lower paid jobs and benefits, we would make the task of tackling housing shortages, congestion, air quality from transport exhausts and power generation, and utility provision that much easier.

The government's aims and targets allow plenty of scope for people with skills, investors, those coming into senior roles in companies, academics and others to come to our country and to contribute as they do now, and they will be most welcome. It does not require any new border arrangements or controls on tourists, visitors, people wishing to support themselves here from their own savings and assets.

A new migration policy requires two things. It needs the government to extend the work permit system from the rest of the world to the whole world as we leave the EU, creating fairness between people from Europe and from anywhere else. It then can set limits to the numbers admitted for lower paid work, and can give sector and regional specific permits out where there is a clear need that cannot be fulfilled from our present population.

It also needs the government to set sensible rules over eligibility to benefits, requiring people coming here to wait before gaining eligibility until they have been taxpayers and settled residents for a reasonable period of time.

I look forward to the government publishing a paper on just how it will run these matters after March 2019.