

Grazeley development

The Councils' bid for infrastructure money to permit a substantial new settlement at Grazeley has made it to the list for further work by the government. The bid for more than £300 m is to provide improved transport links, schools and other public facilities that would be needed if 15000 extra homes are to be built there.

I have always made clear that before I could support such large development at Grazeley I would need to see there was sufficient money to put in good public facilities, and would want assurances that Wokingham would not also face further large scale development elsewhere in the Borough at the same time. I also wish to hear local views on the Council proposals.

Paying for the NHS

I support paying for the NHS out of general taxation, with health care free at the point of need for all UK citizens. I see that there are some who now say we need to put up taxes more to meet the future bills. Some are particularly keen to increase National Insurance. I see no need to do this, and do not think it a good idea to increase taxes on work. I thought all political parties thought work a good thing, with a general enthusiasm for more and better paid jobs as the answer to our economic and social prayers. Taxing work more is not the way to do this.

So how can we meet the increases in spending that we will definitely need in the NHS?

The first thing to improve is to remind everyone this is a National health Service, not a World Health Service. The government and NHS need to get better at collecting the money from patients who are not UK citizens for all non emergency treatment. Someone visiting the UK should be welcome to register with a GP and have access to our hospitals if they need it, but there should be a full charge of the costs to them or their insurance company. I and others have urged the government to do this, and it is official policy. I am not sure it is being implemented properly in each hospital and surgery.

The second is to not have a Transition period with the EU but to move to spending our money on our own priorities from March next year. The Treasury should be leading the opposition to delay in getting our money back, not urging us to give the EU more and more for longer. I don't see what we are buying for the extra £40bn the EU says it wants.

The third is to set tax rates that maximise revenue, which I have discussed

here before. Our tax rates on enterprise, saving and investment are reducing the amount of revenue that could be raised by stifling transactions and new activity. The Treasury accepts the theory that above a certain rate a tax collects less, not more, but still imposes rates that are clearly above the revenue maximising level in some cases.

More jobs, rising wages and lower inflation

In the last three months the UK generated another 168,000 additional jobs. There are now 816,000 vacancies which is good news for those who are still out of work. Unemployment is at 4.3%, well below Euro area levels. Inflation on the government's preferred measure CPI(H) fell to 2.5% whilst wages rose by 2.8% over the last year. Since the vote jobs are well up, pay is up, and the economy continues to expand. So much for the post vote recession they told us we should expect.

A pay rise for the NHS

I campaigned in the last election on the slogan "Prosperity, not austerity", and have argued that we need to spend a bit more on the NHS and education. I have also argued for higher wages, especially for the lower paid in our public services. I am therefore pleased that today we learn there will be a pay rise for NHS staff, with the largest percentage increases for those on the lowest pay. The Treasury accepts it needs to provide some more cash for the NHS to pay for this change. I continue to urge Ministers to provide enough money for Wokingham and West Berkshire services.

Let them eat hake

Yesterday we were told of yet more delay in taking back control of our fish. The government should tell the EU we will resume control in March 2019, as we need to put in a new policy to save what is left of our home industry and get it growing again.

There are two things the government has promised that I agree with

Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

No Deal is better than a bad deal.

It is difficult to know what the government will get in return for the very generous draft offers it has made over money, fish, law taking and freedom of movement for the so called Implementation period.

There is no need for an Implementation period unless there is something really good to implement which takes time.

My advice to the government is to make sure everything works on March 29 2019 when we want to leave. What could be sorted out or agreed after March 2019 that cannot be sorted out in the next year?

Let's cut back the period of uncertainty.