

A new farming policy

One of the big wins from Brexit should be a new farming policy. The Common Agricultural Policy has not been kind to UK farmers. Market share in temperate food products has shrunk badly during our time in the EU, whilst cheaper products from non EU sources have been kept out by tariffs. We have developed a huge balance of trade deficit with the EU in food.

The government always responds positively when I raise the issue of how we can follow a farming policy from the 1 January that gives more help to UK producers, and encourages more domestic production. The government has promised to maintain current overall subsidy levels this Parliament once we are out of the EU, but to gradually redirect them. Large scale profitable farmers will enjoy less subsidy for producing food. More subsidy will go for environmental goods including the promotion of more natural landscapes.

The government will take advantage of our new freedoms to raise animal welfare standards. It is currently consulting on banning the export of live animals, and banning the transport of live animals through the UK by overseas interests. That is welcome.

I would like to see more definition of the schemes available from 1 January to offer support to farmers keen to expand their food production. Market gardeners wishing to whittle away the huge deficit on vegetables, temperate fruits and salad items need to loan and grant schemes to put in the extra covered areas to boost output. As stated before, the fishing industry needs loan and grant schemes to increase our fleet capacity to land our fish. Dairy and meat producers also may need help with mechanising and improving output.

Our competitors use these methods to gain market share. The government has promised us more of a response, so bring it on.

The EU still wants to keep us in the single market and customs union

Right from the start of the endless and so far fruitless negotiations between the UK and the EU there has been a fundamental divide. The UK has proposed a Free Trade Agreement between a sovereign UK and the EU, just as the EU has with countries like Canada and Japan. The UK has always been clear we wish to leave the single market and customs union, to be free to run our own international trade policy and to determine our own laws.

It is true that under Mrs May in the second phase of her government muddle was created by some in the UK negotiating team seeking to replicate many of

the features of EU membership and being prepared to sacrifice sovereignty in return for this. Remain forces in the UK made regular trips to Brussels to offer their help in binding the UK back into much of the EU without formally being members, the worst possible outcome. If you have to comply with their laws you at least want some voice and vote in an effort to try to see off the worst changes they might propose.

Under Mr Johnson and Mr Frost we are assured the position has been clear. We want to be an independent country and are willing to be good friends and to offer a free trade area which would assist the EU more than the UK given the large imbalance in trade in their favour. There is no need for the UK to give them our fish, or to accept their laws, or to agree to arbitration of disputes entailing subservience to their court. Anyone of those would be a violation of the purpose and spirit of Brexit.

I did not expect to be still writing such obvious and necessary words this late in the year. I trust the government sticks to its promises. The EU has to make up its mind. If it is negotiating in good faith it will need to accept a Free Trade Agreement, not continued membership of the single market. It will have to abandon its wish to make our laws after we have left, and accept it will not arbitrate any future disputes in the ECJ.

The EU Treaty states the EU should pursue good neighbourliness and prosperity with neighbouring states, and should encourage the progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade. It's a pity they do not think this applies to their relations with an independent UK, and a pity they have torn up the clause in the Political Agreement which states the future relationship will be based on a Free Trade Agreement.

Christmas Travel Window

I have received this update from the Secretary of State for Transport:

Dear John

I am writing to provide you with an update on the Government's preparations for the Christmas period.

The Government recently published guidance to help families and friends see each other over the Christmas period – and to do so as safely as possible. Between 23rd and 27th of December or between 22nd and 28th of December for those travelling to and from Northern Ireland, travel restrictions across the UK and between tiers will be lifted to allow three households to come together. Once at their destination, people should follow the rules in that tier.

We are working with transport operators to help people see their loved ones,

safely. We ask everyone to closely consider their journey, plan and book ahead, be patient, and be considerate of fellow passengers – and particularly staff who have worked so hard all year – by following the guidance carefully, including keeping space and wearing a face covering on public transport.

To help people travel safely and minimise disruption as far as possible over the Christmas period, we are deploying a series of measures.

- On our strategic road network of motorways and trunk roads, Highways England have **cleared a total of 778 miles of roadworks**, meaning that 96% of the network will be unaffected. Where essential work must continue, speed limits will be set at 60mph (rather than 50mph) where possible to keep disruption to a minimum.
- Ministers have written to all Local Authorities in England with the request that they lift as many roadworks as possible and **ensure bus services are running reliably** over the period, to ease traffic on local roads.
- Network Rail will ensure that **over 95% of the network will be unaffected by engineering works** over the Christmas period. Where essential works must continue, replacement buses will be available.
- We are also working with train operators, a number of whom have already confirmed they will **run longer trains** and increase service levels. For example, longer trains will run on Anglo-Scotland and Liverpool routes to boost the number of seats at anticipated busy times on the West Coast Main Line. Chiltern Railway will also run additional services on the 27 December, and East Midlands Railway will run a full intercity timetable over the Christmas period.
- The Government is also **waiving change of journey admin fees** for Advance rail tickets sold before the announcement of new Covid tiers on 26th November, ensuring passengers are not left out of pocket for changing their tickets to comply with the guidance.

To provide further support to passengers, Network Rail and train operators have been asked to ensure extra staff are in place at key stations to provide assistance. British Transport Police will also be deploying extra officers to help keep passengers safe.

All transport operators have been asked to increase the clarity and regularity of communications with passengers, to help them plan their journeys, warn of any disruption and offer support.

Finally, to protect and support the resilience of transport workers on the frontline, we are working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care and transport operators on rapid testing at selected sites, the first of which is going live next week.

Further details on these measures can be found in the annex.

To help provide rigorous scrutiny of these plans, the Government has appointed Sir Peter Hendy – Chair of Network Rail – who will work alongside

operators and the Department for Transport. He will ensure there is a collective focus across the transport industry on minimising disruption and supporting passengers.

We are also continuing to work with the Devolved Administrations on our plans to ensure we take an aligned approach as far as possible.

I am confident that the measures set out above will ensure that people can travel as safely and reliably as possible if they choose to, and we are doing everything we can to help people see their loved ones safely this Christmas.

Yours ever,

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT

Consultation concerning a ban on live animal exports

You will be interested to know that the Government has now launched a consultation concerning a ban on live animal exports:

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/transforming-farm-animal-health-and-welfare-team/improvements-to-animal-welfare-in-transport/>

The consultation gives you an opportunity to register your views and will be open **until 28 January 2021**.

Vaccines change the situation

Many governments, health services and the world health bodies have always wanted a vaccine to be the eventual way out of the pandemic. Yesterday they got much nearer to that outcome, with the announcement of the formal recognition of the safety and efficacy of the Pfizer BioN Tech vaccine by the UK's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, and the roll out of the Sputnik V vaccine as an approved treatment in Russia.

Dr June Raine, the CEO of the MHRA, was keen to tell UK residents that "the public's safety has always been at the forefront of our minds – safety is our watchword." She assured her audience that they had not taken any short cuts

and had pored over much data before concluding the product meets both their safety and their efficacy standards.

The Pfizer vaccine uses a relatively new technique, mRNA, to trigger immune responses should the virus attack. So too does the Moderna product, which may soon follow with a permission. The Astra Zeneca Oxford University vaccine may be third to get approval, and uses a Replication deficient viral vector. They needed to supply more information on their tests given the different doses actually deployed with different results.

I always point out this site does not give medical advice, as I am not qualified. Individuals thinking of accepting a vaccination need to make their own decisions based on the information provided by the companies supplying the product and the NHS, and may take their own doctor's advice if they have concerns.

If enough people volunteer for the vaccination, as seems likely given the strong encouragement from the NHS and from the government's own medical experts, it will be easier to secure a removal of controls over our lives.

There should be no question of people having to take the vaccine, nor of vaccine passports being used as a lever to get more people to take the vaccine. The vaccine should stand on its own merits. The more information the Regulators can share with the public the better, as confidence comes from an open approach, not from hectoring and limited communication of the facts.

First use of the first vaccine is likely to be in hospitals who have the specialist equipment to store the vaccine. There will be guidance about who has priority to receive it.