

Night shelter

On Thursday evening I visited the Wokingham night shelter. I thanked the volunteers who are available to help anyone in need of a bed for the night.

I pointed out that the government is keen to ensure everyone has an option other than sleeping rough and has just announced more cash for our local area and others, as recorded on this site.

I also encouraged the volunteers to help persuade anyone without a bed one night to seek wider help, as often the underlying problem requires assistance from social services and welfare. The state does have many programmes to help people back into work, to help them find and pay for housing and tackle problems of drink and drugs where these are the cause of the difficulties.

Encouraging entrepreneurship

The lifeblood of an enterprise economy comes from the ability of the many to set up and run a business for themselves if they wish. A vigorous private sector has easy ways for new businesses to be born, and sensible ways for failing businesses to be wound down or stopped.

The ability to set up a business rests on self belief, access to property, skills and capital, and a favourable balance of risk and reward for doing so. The UK has a relatively good rate of new business formation compared to the rest of the EU, but falls behind the USA in capacity to set up and grow businesses, especially beyond a certain small scale.

The first thing the government should do is to advise schools and Colleges that self employment is a serious career option. Indeed, the brightest and most energetic students are above all the people that should be asked if they will set up a business of their own rather than seeking the comfort of a cosy job with a large corporation or state actor. Enterprise should also be for the many, as many people who are not interested in academic subjects or who do not excel at passing exams may be excellent at understanding customer needs and meeting client requirements.

People training at Colleges to be plumbers, electricians, cooks, house maintenance people and other skills should be offered supporting courses on how to offer their services through their own business.

The government needs to revisit IR35. It should be easy to gain self employed tax status for all those who are offering their work to clients and customers other than through someone else's company as a company employee.

The government should raise the VAT threshold higher so people can increase their turnover more before needing to get help and advice on how to comply with VAT.

The government should derate small business premises altogether so starter units are rates free.

On the technology frontiers

As the digital revolution sweeps on we will face more and more dilemmas about personal freedom versus personal empowerment.

In its early days the internet was largely unregulated, allowing a profusion of new communications, spawning an army of citizen journalists with their own take on events and permitted advice on any topic including the assistance of crime.

As the internet grew so governments understandably intervened to stop extreme abuses. The internet should not be a school for terrorists, an on line academy for bomb makers or a means of money laundering large sums from the proceeds of crime.

Some also asked that the internet be subject to the same laws of libel and slander as the regular media. Many asked for protection from false allegations and from messages of hatred. This has opened up a debate about the duties of internet providers, the extent to which censorship is needed and justified, and the role of the internet in causing harm as well as its manifold ways of doing good.

There are contributors to this site who are deeply suspicious of how the state behaves and how it might come to use new digital controls for its own ends. Would the evolution of a cashless economy mean not merely full visibility of all transactions by the state but state controls and limitations on those same transactions? At what point does a better convenience for users become an unwarranted intrusion into privacy? Should we all expect in the emerging world that all our actions, words, purchases are fully available for public scrutiny, or do there remain legitimate reasons for people to be able to keep to themselves what they lawfully do?

Authoritarian societies can deploy digital communications, cashless money, transaction reporting to control their people. They could decline to sell a train ticket to a protest location. They could decline credit to people who join the political opposition. They could intercept on line conversations between friends wishing to share annoyance at government activities.

The challenge for the free West to keep its freedoms is to get the right balance between tackling serious crime conducted in whole or part through

digital activities, whilst allowing the usual privacies of people's spending habits, criticisms of government and the rest that constitute a free society.

There is the additional challenge that as the giant corporations of the current digital era emerge with all their power, the western system should allow strong competition and challenge to them. There is a danger in codifying how they behave and laying down in law too much of how their business has to be conducted. These can become barriers to innovation by smaller companies, and can impose expensive barriers to entry to the business.

As we leave the EU the UK should revisit its laws and regulations governing the digital world to strike a good balance between keeping us safe and allowing plenty of competition.

Free enterprise brings us choice and progress

Many of the things we enjoy have come from competition and choice, from free enterprise. Post war living standards rose as tvs, fridges, washing machines and cars became affordable for the many instead of being the luxuries of the few. This century has seen digital technology transform lives. It has placed a mobile phone in most pockets and handbags, equipped the many with an easy to work camera and allowed a whole new world of communication and entertainment to be available instantly any time, any day.

These breakthroughs came from entrepreneurs and private sector companies. Often the challengers had to combat unhelpful regulations and protective old model established companies. In recent years digital business models have dramatically changed advertising, the media, agency businesses and retail, and are going on to change finance and other services.

The successful countries which do most to promote living standards and welfare of their people are the ones who not only understand this but do most to allow free enterprise to flourish. Lower taxes, sensible regulations, a strong rule of law which protects challengers as well as the established businesses, and a climate which encourages talent and enterprise friendly education all help. In future blogs I am going to explore how the UK can provide more opportunity for enterprise to flourish and living standards to rise.

Welcome to the exciting 20s

There is no more important task than restoring our right to self government. By the end of the first year of this decade the UK people and Parliament once again will control their laws, money and borders as they wish.

I have every confidence in the people of the UK to make wise choices and to lobby for better government. It has been the people, not their leaders, that have insisted on the UK becoming again an independent country. It will be the people that hold successive governments to account to use the powers well and to spend the tax revenues sensibly.

Once we are fully out we will have more of our own money to spend. Money played an important part in the referendum campaign. Remain forces at home and in the EU have been particularly keen to burden us with as much continuing EU spend as possible to limit the obvious gains controlling our own money brings.

Once we are fully out we can make laws that improve our lives and scrap laws that get in the way. An early candidate for reform and repeal are all the fishing rules that have done so much to damage our fishing grounds. We will be able to raise our standards of animal welfare as we wish. We can have regulations for business which set high standards in ways that allow us good trade with the rest of the world as well as with the EU.

Once fully out we can set our own taxes. We will no longer be subject to losing corporation tax revenues owing to some legal case at the ECJ overturning Parliament's wishes. We will no longer have to impose VAT on green products and female hygiene goods. We will not have to keep our tax rates within specified bands or at required levels.

The bigger gain will be in our standing in the world. We can become a leading force for free trade through our independent membership of the World Trade Organisation. They would like a major economy to work with them to promote an agenda of freer trade worldwide at a time when the USA is using tariffs and other barriers to trade as a major instrument of wider policy. We will have our own voice and vote in many other international bodies where before we had to accept the EU line.

The UK is well placed to grow faster, to promote democratic and peace loving values worldwide, and to win new friends and influence.