

Nominations in Wokingham

I wish to thank the 30 electors who signed my Nomination papers to be the official Conservative candidate in Wokingham.

I see from the final list of candidates there will also be an Advance Together, Green, Labour and Lib Dem candidate.

Tree planting

I am glad the government shares my enthusiasm for more trees. We need to keep the woodlands we still have left, and expand our forest cover. Trees enhance the landscape, help bind the soil, act as windbreaks and often improve the view. Properly tended they can also be an important source of raw material and income when harvested and replaced with saplings.

Locally our Councils are working to boost tree numbers. Nationally the government has committed to 11 million extra trees. It is making money available through both urban and rural tree funds. It is backing the Forestry Commission who have a big programme.

This work needs to be part of better planning. I am working with Wokingham Borough Council on the next local plan which I want to slow the rate of development after the substantial housebuilding of the current plan period. I want the Plan to make proper provision for green gaps between settlements, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, parks, woodlands and other amenity areas.

Many of us get a lift from our green environment. One of the best features of England is our fabled "green and pleasant land". The mild temperate climate gives us green fields and leafy trees for much of the year which provides a good local environment close to nature. I am glad our local Councils are busy protecting and enhancing our green environment.

We also need to have a fair and controlled system of immigration. Our welcome to new people needs to be at a sustainable pace.

Flood alerts

The Environment Agency has put a flood alert on the Emm brook but said they

do not expect any property flooding in our area.

I have worked with the Agency and the Council on schemes to reduce flood risk. A lot of building has taken place on low lying land which can increase the pace of water run off swelling rivers and streams. Some remedial action has been taken, but more is needed.

When we get a lot of rain as recently it is a reminder that if new development goes ahead on low lying sites there needs to be substantial action to ensure safe water run off at a pace local water courses can accept without spilling above their banks.

Keeping watercourses and drains for surface water clear helps. In some cases when there is too much water it does need to settle on open land away from homes in the way water meadows used to work before all the building.

Migration

I see the Home Secretary is pledging to cut net migration once we leave the EU, bringing freedom of movement from the EU into the UK to seek work and related benefits to an end. Other parties in the election wish to continue with EU freedom of movement.

The numbers need working out in detail when we leave. The government will be happy to welcome students to UK universities, highly skilled workers to well paid jobs, and lower paid workers to important areas with low domestic availability of labour. There is talk of an agricultural worker scheme for example. The plan is to have a fair system for evaluating demand for Labour and eligibility for applicants.

The important thing is we can decide and control the process. There will also continue to be a fair system for helping refugees.

Total numbers need to be sustainable and give plenty of opportunity to people already legally settled here to get available jobs.

More jobs and lower inflation

This week has brought good news that unemployment is at a 45 year low. Although slowing, the economy is still generating additional new full time jobs. Pay is rising at 3.6%, usefully faster than price rises at 1.5%.

The combined effect of job availability in most places with rising pay means people can afford to spend a bit more. Pressures on budgets ease when pay rises by more than prices, and when people get promotion or move to better paid jobs.

It has been a battle to get the state deficit down from the unsustainable Labour levels of 2009-10 to something we can afford. It has taken time to reduce the high levels of unemployment the government inherited in 2010.

There is nothing wrong with some borrowing, both for individuals and for companies. Buying your own home usually entails accepting a large mortgage. 20-25 years later you own the home with no more mortgage or rent bills to come. Buying a car with a loan or lease arrangement also makes sense as most people do not have the cost of a car in their savings account. If you have a job and a stable income the car is affordable.

Similarly successful companies can borrow to finance their stock or work in progress, or to finance capital equipment they need to produce their goods or services. A sensible level of borrowing can help their business and enhance returns for their owners.

Some query the need for the state to borrow. Under the new rules the government will only borrow for capital investment. Where the government borrows to deliver a service which the customers pay for, it can be a commercial return like any other. In most cases the state will be offering the service free to the user, paid for out of taxes. This makes evaluating the return more difficult. It does not mean there is no return or no need for necessary capital spending on roads, hospitals or schools. The government has to assess the outcome sensibly.