

## Housing numbers

During my last meeting with Wokingham Borough I was reminded that Wokingham has a target to build 856 new homes a year from 2013. (LEP study of housing need Feb 2016) That makes Wokingham's share of the West Berkshire total 30%, with the other Councils providing the rest of the 2855. Reading itself has a lower target of 699, despite having substantial brownfield redevelopment potential, the coming of Crossrail and the possibility of more starter home and smaller flats in the centre. Bracknell has to build just 635 a year. Going forward there needs to be a fair division of the requirement.

The total numbers needed in the future also should take into account any change of migration policy designed to lower the numbers of additional people coming to live and work in the country as a whole. The current high numbers of new home sis partly the result of adding 330,000 extra people each year to our population, as we wish anyone coming to live and work here to have access to decent housing. If the government sticks to its target of a substantial reduction and takes the necessary measures on leaving the EU, could the targets be lowered.

Were the Council to agree to a new settlement at Grazeley of 15,000 homes that would on its own provide 17.5 years worth of housing against targets. Would the development be spaced out over such a time period? Is it feasible to say no to building on any other large sites throughout such a long time period? Or might Grazeley add to the build rate? If other sites are granted on appeal or run over from past grants of planning, then we need to build even more infrastructure to take care of a faster build rate than present plans.

I am writing to the authorities to ask what thought is going in to future targets in the light of these issues.

---

## UK inflation falls in January compared to December. Core inflation holds steady.

The CPI index fell 0.5% in January compared to December. Food prices also fell 0.5% over the same time period, despite the bad weather effects on vegetables.

Core inflation over the last twelve months stayed at the same level as in December, at 1.6%.

Overall the CPI rose by 1.8% over the last twelve months. This was a higher annual rate than December owing to the fall out of a very good month a year ago. The main factor, accounting for half the annual increase came from higher oil prices affecting transport. The UK inflation rate is mirroring the German and US rates, affected by the same world oil price rise. The other most buoyant item was the increase over the last year in restaurant and hotel bills, reflecting higher wages.

January's figures were helped by falls in clothing and footwear prices, and by the intense supermarket competition which kept food prices down.

---

## The UK leaving the EU is no divorce and we certainly do not have to pay alimony

One of the more absurd analogies that pass for debate in the EU is that the EU and the UK need a divorce settlement. For a body which loves Treaties and lawyers it is bizarre. The Treaty makes no provision to require a departing state to pay an extra one off payment, nor does it seek or have any power over former states to carry on paying contributions. There is no need for lengthy negotiations on this obvious point. The answer to the request for a large one off financial contribution is No.

To make this a more interesting and longer article, I will however extend the divorce metaphor that so many like. Were this a divorce, it is between two high earning partners. The domineering husband, the EU, earns six times as much as his UK wife. He lives in a large suburban family home in Berlin, with a smart modern flat in Brussels. His wife has a country cottage in Wiltshire where she has retreated to as whenever they meet she just gets shouted at and told what to do. He has a large Mercedes. She drives a modern Mini.

Fortunately there are no children from the marriage. She is generously offering a clean break settlement to the husband to speed things up and to get on with her life, free of his endless demands for cash and obedience. It's none of her business that he has run up huge bills with his Greek affairs, as she did not agree to any of those and made clear her wish to keep out of it all at the time.

As the husband wishes to undertake the divorce in a foreign court and she intends to live under UK law it is difficult to see how the husband thinks he can carry on with his demands once his foreign jurisdiction no longer applies.

---

## Heathrow expansion – Draft Airports National Policy Statement

The Government is currently seeking views on the draft the Airports National Policy Statement. Details of the consultation can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/heathrow-expansion-draft-airports-national-policy-statement>.

There are a number of consultation events taking place, such as one in Bracknell on Thursday 16 February 2017 at Carnation Hall. Further details are available on the consultation page.

---

## The established media peddle plenty of alternative facts

It is fascinating to see the traditional media wrestling with other ways of looking at the world. They don't seem to like competitive opinions. It is high time some of their own alternative facts were exposed to criticism.

The media regularly tells us that the Conservatives in government cut public spending. If you look at the figures you find that it climbed in real terms from £249bn to £292 bn under Mr Heath, from £326 bn to £437 bn under Mrs Thatcher and Sir John Major, and has risen again under Mr Cameron. (2011-12 constant price basis). The OBR forecasts further real growth this Parliament. The media instead usually takes a figure about the proportion of National Income, so that if the private sector grows faster than the state sector they can call this a cut! They never use the cash figures because these have surged.

The media also regularly tells us Sir John Major's government fell because the party was split on Europe. If you look at the polls you see the Conservative ratings plunged when the economic damage of the European Exchange Mechanism became clear when we were forced to abandon that crazy policy and never picked up. All the rows over Maastricht and the Euro made no difference to the poll ratings.

The media often present Treasury and Other consensus economic forecasts as if they were reality. They rarely ask why these bodies failed to forecast the Exchange Rate Mechanism recession, the Banking Crash recession or the Euro crisis. Now they should ask why these bodies did forecast a 2016-17 recession

for the UK which visibly is not happening.

The media love running Big business threatens to pull out stories about their presence in the UK if we resist features of the EU. They ran these stories when we decided to stay out of the Euro and were wrong then. Now they run them about leaving the EU, and were wrong about the short term impact and will doubtless be wrong about the long term as well.