

School Buildings

The law lays down that the maintenance and safety of school buildings is the responsibility of the Council acting as the Local Education Authority or the Educational Trust in the case of Academy schools. The Governors and senior management team of each school should also take a close interest in the state of the fabric and the safety of pupils, and are best placed day by day to see faults, cracks and problems with the building structure. They report to the LEA or Trust and should be accountable to them.

It was apparently well known and much discussed over recent years that any building built more than 30 years ago with RAAC concrete contains beams and sections in this material that may have gone beyond the end of its useful life. For some years those in charge of buildings or responsible for maintenance should have been on watch to see if there were any signs of loss of strength, cracking or other signs of degeneration in RAAC concrete components. It was clear to all concerned that if there were there might be a temporary fix of providing extra support to beams or sections that could weaken or snap , preparatory to replacement.

It appears that the government was also monitoring this problem as it may well have direct responsibility for other public sector structures. It decided it needed to intervene with schools, sending them a questionnaire to see how many RAAC buildings at possible risk there were. It then circulated more guidance about the issues this concrete poses and put in Inspectors to review those buildings that did have RAAC. Now the government is being attacked for telling the schools to take tougher action with some of these given recent evidence that there can be RAAC failures in beams or sections that did not show signs of decay. The government has also promised central taxpayer money to fix the issues.

Surely we need to ask how come more of the expensive local bureaucracies that control our LEA schools did not take stronger action earlier, and why they had not reviewed and surveyed on their own initiative? We have many examples of power delegated to local government or to quangos in the UK, yet whenever anything goes wrong blame is usually transferred by the Opposition and media back to the government. If the government is to be to blame for everything maybe we should save the money on the delegated authorities that are not doing the job.

We need to ask what role did LEAs have in using RAAC concrete in the original buildings? Did they not keep a record of how the building was built? What actions had they taken in recent years when it came to light this concrete can deteriorate and has a limited useful and safe life in various cases? You would have thought LEAs and Governing bodies of schools would know the details of how the schools were built and the risks in the form of construction undertaken. They could have taken action to avert problems before the beginning of term. The idea of delegation is based on the simple fact that the school and LEA managers know these buildings and visit them daily or regularly. Ministers have visited very few of them.

Whither the Church of England?

A recent survey shows a further decline in UK citizens professing to be Christian or religious in any way.

It is not surprising the Church of England has lost congregations and struggles to attract new supporters. It has used its presence in the Lords and its public platforms to be an ally of many Lib Dem causes, a party which polls around 10% in national polls. It uses its privileged position to promote more overseas aid, more migrants into the UK and to condemn government attempts to stop illegal and dangerous boat crossings from a safe country called France. It is not so keen to use its national pulpit to spread the gospel. It is reluctant to talk about its own extensive property estate and share portfolio. There are times when it turns out they hold shares that do not reflect their views on fossil fuels or other equality matters. The property estate has not been used to house many new arrivals in the UK at a time of extreme housing need given the numbers involved.

The decline of congregations reflects the hostility the Church shows to people with conservative views, as those who were regular Churchgoers have in some cases been put off by the criticisms.

As a democrat who believes people should be free to hold views and disagree with the government I do not object to the clergy who rail against the government. They should not however be surprised to discover that associating themselves with minority partisan views in their official roles will speed the decline of their congregations. Nor should they look hurt when those they criticise examine the Church's actions and investments to see if they reflect the left wing political opinions they espouse. Church properties do not help reduce our carbon footprint, nor are they made available to house the many new arrivals the Church supports.

UK trade

The UK trade figures were altered as we finally left the EU, disrupting comparisons. We are told they were changed from an Intrastate to a Customs basis, and were told there were missing numbers from the early months after the change owing to data collection issues. As many Remain MPs and commentators thought the issue of the EU was all about trade it is irritating that the numbers were disrupted just as we left.

Now things should have settled down a bit we can compare 2022 as we came out

of covid lockdowns with 2019 before covid and before exit. The 2022 figures show goods imports and exports both strongly up . I use goods because the Remain MPs never seemed interested in our good surplus in services and our success in selling services to non EU Countries despite the absence of services chapters in EU trade deals with other countries.

Non EU trade has continued to grow faster than our EU trade as it was doing when we were still in the EU, and is larger than our EU trade. Our imports from the EU are still very large. We need to adopt the various policies I have been proposing to grow more of our own food, produce more of our own energy and make more of our own goods. Government has promised the first two and needs to get on with the methods to do so.

It was always strange that UK pro Remain MPs and commentators always pretended the EU was just a free trade area when it was a customs union as part of a much bigger Union where the other members saw the importance of wide ranging EU level government, single currency, common debts, common foreign and security policy and the rest. Even on the issue of trade the Remain MPs were wrong. Our trade has not been badly damaged by the exit. It is up, though as in the EU we still import more than we export to the continent and need to tackle the imbalances.

[Venture capital for growing businesses](#)

In 2022 the US continued to dominate venture capital investment in growing companies and backing new ideas. Although well down on 2021 record levels the US invested \$245 bn, four times much as China in second place with \$61 bn. The UK was third with \$31bn, twice the French level and two a half times Germany who were in fifth and seventh place in the world league. India was fourth and South Korea sixth.

Strong venture capital, backing many smaller, innovative companies and companies needing restructuring is crucial to good levels of economic growth. Business constantly needs to adapt and to invest as technology revolves and consumer expectations change. One of the ways the US ends up with more the largest quoted companies is it nurtures a large population of growing and innovative companies to give it more chance of success with creating the giants.

Venture capital can be encouraged by allowing easy access to licences and markets for safe products. The EU is suspicious of the new and slow to permit. The UK has to establish itself as an independent regulator , striking a good balance between protecting consumers from harm and allowing changes to product and processes to proceed quickly.

I have set out before tax proposals to boost self employment and allow the faster growth of small companies during their early stages. We need to be

friendly to small business and to start ups, as they will be the seedcorn for the new larger businesses we will need in the years ahead.

The top ten companies in the all world index are all US

If we take the market value of quoted companies as a measure of success for economies to create and grow major businesses, the US dominates. The top ten biggest in the all world index are all US. 7 of the top ten are digital technology giants, with Google appearing twice in the list with its two kinds of shares both in the top ten by their individual value. There is then a car company, a financial company and a healthcare company.

You have to go to number 14 to find a non US company. That is Taiwan Semiconductor. The rest of the top fifteen are all US, adding an oil company, a bank, and two pharmaceutical companies to the top ten.

So we see the pattern. The EU with its 120 million more people and its self promoted single market has not just missed out on the great growth opportunities in on line shopping, data search, software supply, social media and semiconductor design and production. It has failed to get a large bank, pharmaceutical or energy company using older technology into the top fifteen as well.

The EU which has taken the net zero revolution more seriously than pre Biden America has not produced an electric car company that can keep up with Tesla. It has let China dominate in producing solar panels and wind energy. So what is wrong?

The EU has gone for the high tax high regulation model. Much of the tenor of EU regulation is hostile to innovation, seeking to lay down in law how the main companies currently design and produce a good, limiting the ability to change or challenge the established products and players. There is less entrepreneurship. Major companies have a long gone entrepreneurial past and a bureaucratic present management reacting more to government than to customers. These businesses often seem out of touch with consumers and so vulnerable to better and more modern US and Chinese offerings. There must be reasons why JP Morgan is bigger than any EU commercial bank, why Tesla not a German company pioneered high priced electric cars and why the main pharmaceutical companies and new drugs are from the USA.

The UK too lacks a top fifteen company. Its long association with EU laws has not helped, and its current business taxes are too high.