

Leadership of the country

Given the unusual events playing out this week I write this short piece to give people an opportunity to send in their views. I am consulting widely on what should now happen.

I am strongly of the view that the issue of leadership has to be resolved by the Conservative Parliamentary party. An early General election is not in the national interest. We need urgent Ministerial action to promote growth and tackle the cost of living crisis. There is a majority to do what needs doing.

My Speech at the Westminster Hall debate on the UK's Energy Security Strategy

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): I welcome any measure to buttress our energy security. Ministers are right to be alert to the difficulties we face. I am concerned about this decade. Once again in this debate, we have heard many ideas about nuclear, wind and solar—new technologies that may make a great contribution in the next decade—but our task today is to reinforce all the things that the Minister is doing to keep our lights on for the next three or four years. Our more immediate task is to see what contribution the United Kingdom can make to getting Russian gas and oil out of the European system. We need to make our contribution, providing more of that supply from our domestic sources as part of our war effort. We need our people, who want to keep the lights on and the boilers running, to feel secure that we will make our contribution in case Russia turns the taps off.

Wera Hobhouse MP (Lib): It is simply not true that renewable energy projects will take until next decade to be developed. In fact, many of them are waiting; it is just that they cannot be connected to the grid. Can the right hon. Gentleman correct what he has just said about renewable energy projects?

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): I am afraid that the hon. Lady, and other Members who have made similar contributions, do not understand that I am dealing with the problem of intermittency. In order for all the extra wind they want to be useful, there needs to be a way of timesharing the wind power. We already have days on which wind and solar together produce less than 10% of our electricity, and most of our constituents are not using electricity to drive or to heat their homes, so that is a very small proportion of our total energy.

The vision of wind requires mass battery storage—we seem to be years away from the technology and the investment required to do that—and/or conversion to hydrogen. Green hydrogen would be a perfectly good answer, but again, we are years away from the investment, the practicalities and the commercial projects that could turn that wind energy into hydrogen. My constituents would love it if they could get hydrogen today. They do not want to have to rip out their gas boiler; they would quite like to be able to route more hydrogen through the existing gas boiler and make their contribution to the green revolution.

However, MPs have to be realistic. Our prime duty is to ensure that our constituents can live in relative prosperity, keep the lights on and have access to decent energy for their requirements. At the moment, most of our constituents get to work and to the shops using a diesel or petrol van or car; most heat their homes and water with a gas, oil or coal boiler. Very few use electric technology for that. If there was the great popular electrical revolution that they have bought into, and they could suddenly afford the electrical products and liked them, we would have a huge problem, because we would be chronically short of electricity generating capacity.

The true electrical revolution on the scale that Wera Hobhouse would like would require an enormous investment in new electrical capacity. If everybody went home tonight and plugged in their car, which uses more electricity than the rest of the home, and heated their homes using electricity, there would need to be a big increase in capacity. The hon. Lady is shaking her head. She wants to get real! Does she really want to cut off her constituents because she so hates them using gas?

Wera Hobhouse MP (Lib): This is about choices. We cannot forever get stuck in the past, as we have just heard. We need to look forward to the future. Investment in renewables is the only way I can see as the right way forward. Yes, that needs adaptation; yes, that needs our constituents to come along. However, it is a necessity. We cannot bury our heads in the sand.

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): Once again, the hon. Lady is in denial. She will not answer the intermittency problem. Does she ever look at the hourly and daily statistics on the grid to see, quite often, how little of our power is renewable-generated? That is because of physics and weather. We have to find technological answers to that. Now, there are technological answers, but at the moment they are not being adopted. They are not commercial and they have not been trialled properly; there may be safety issues and all sorts of things.

Peter Dowd MP (Lab): Yes, they have.

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman says that they have been trialled. Why are they not there, then? Why can I not turn on my hydrogen tap now? There are all sorts of commercial issues and issues about how to route it to every home and so forth.

Peter Dowd MP (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is so fixed on this idea of commerciality. There will potentially come a point when the taxpayer—for the

sake of argument—decides that the Government are going to invest. I know that the right hon. Gentleman has an ideological obsession with the Government not doing that. However, in the current situation, does he not agree that the state might sometimes have to do just that?

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): But that is happening. We already have one of the most over-managed systems because successive Governments have put in all sorts of subsidies, tax breaks, interventions, price controls and all the rest of it to try to send those signals. That is why we have the current mix—it is not the exact mix the market would have produced.

I fully accept that there is often a role for Government when we try to develop new technologies. I have no problem with that. However, it does require agreement on what that technology is, agreement on the scale of the effort needed and realism about how many years it would take. It is all very well for the Members present to say that they have a vision of everybody using an electric car and having a heat pump. However, if their constituents cannot afford it or do not want it, it does not matter what Members think—they have to deal with the world as it is. We cannot lecture our constituents into having a heat pump. They will have a heat pump when it is affordable, when it is a good product and when they think it makes sense, and they are nowhere near coming to that conclusion at the moment.

The crucial question in this debate is what more the United Kingdom can do at this critical moment. We have to help our allies and friends on the continent who are gas short and oil short and want to get Russia out of their supply system but cannot do so because it would collapse their industry, while Russia is financing a war by selling its oil and gas into Europe as well as elsewhere. I think there is a lot more we can do.

I urge the Minister to see it as both a patriotic duty and a crucial duty to our allies to work closely with our producers and owners of oil and gas reserves in the United Kingdom and maximise output as quickly as possible. Some of the output can be increased quite quickly; for others, it will take two or three years to get the investments in. Will the Minister do everything he can to expedite it? We owe that to our constituents, because gas and oil are too dear—every little extra that we can produce will make a little difference—and confidence in markets might be affected. Above all, we owe it to our allies, who will otherwise be financing Putin's war.

[John Redwood urges government to accept new clauses to Planning Bill](#)

To move the following Clause–

“Community right of appeal

- The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is amended as follows.
- After section 78 (right to appeal against planning decisions and failure to take such decisions) insert–

“78ZA Community right of appeal

- The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision–
- enabling communities to appeal against a decision to grant planning permission or permission in principle for a development, and
- about such appeals.
- The regulations may require a certain number or proportion of residents of a local area to record objection against a decision for such an appeal to proceed.
- The regulations may, in particular, make provision the upholding of such appeals and the revocation of permission if–
- the development is inconsistent with a relevant neighbourhood plan, or
- due process has not been followed in relation to the planning application.
- The first regulations under this section must be laid before Parliament before the end of the period of six months beginning on the day on which this section comes into force.””

Member’s explanatory statement

This new clause would introduce a community right of appeal against the granting of planning permission

Amendment 57

Clause 83, page 91, line 30, leave out “national development management policy” and insert “the development plan”

Member’s explanatory statement

This amendment would require any conflict between a local development plan and a national development management strategy to be resolved in favour of the local development plan.

NC15

To move the following Clause–

“Requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework

- The Secretary of State must ensure that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is in accordance with subsections (2) to (6).
- The NPPF must not contain a presumption in favour of sustainable development including where there are no relevant development plan policies, or such policies are out-of-date.
- The NPPF must provide for the right for persons to object to individual planning applications.
- The NPPF must provide that the Planning Inspectorate may only recommend that local plans not be adopted if–
 1. the consequences of that local plan would be detrimental to the objectives of such plans, and
 2. that local plan is markedly and verifiably atypical in comparison to other such plans.
- The NPPF must permit local planning authorities to impose bans on greenfield development in their areas, other than in exceptional circumstances, where–
 1. greenfield areas make a marked contribution to the local economy through leisure or tourism, and
 2. where sufficient brownfield land is likely to be available to meet housing needs identified in neighbourhood and local plans.
- The NPPF must include specific measures designed to support the creation of additional retirement homes, sheltered accommodation for the elderly and facilities for care homes.
- This section comes into force at the end of the period of six months beginning on the day on which this Act is passed.”

Member’s explanatory statement

This new clause requires a revised NPPF within six months to provide that, among other things, there should be no presumption of sustainable development.

5 Year Land Supply– NC14

“Prohibition of mandatory targets and abolition of five-year land supply rule

- (1) Any housebuilding target for local planning authorities in–
 - the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF),
- (b) regulations made under any enactment, or
- (c) any planning policy document may only be advisory and not mandatory.

(2) Accordingly, such targets should not be taken into account in determining planning applications.

(3) The NPPF must not impose an obligation on local planning authorities to ensure that sufficient housing development sites are available over five years or any other given period.”

Member's explanatory statement

This new clause requires a revised NPPF within six months to provide that housing targets are advisory not mandatory and that the five-year housing land supply rule will no longer apply.

Debate on energy security

I spoke yesterday in a Westminster Hall debate about the UK's energy security. The Minister Greg Hands confirmed that the UK is pressing ahead with new oil and gas investments as part of an effort to reduce European dependence on Russian hydrocarbons. He told us the UK is supplying gas to the continent this summer from its LNG import facilities, to help fill their storage facilities ahead of the winter. The UK of course has very little storage of its own. It had low storage because it used to be able to produce 100% of the gas we needed so the storage was the original gas fields themselves.

The Opposition parties continued to live in a make believe world where a bit more investment in windfarms would solve the problems of our energy supply. They revealed two mistakes in their thinking. They firstly failed to realise that electricity supplies a minority of our total energy needs, as we depend substantially on gas delivered direct to homes and factories for heat and power, and on petrol and diesel for much of our transport. If you wish to depend on renewables you first have to convert all vehicles to electricity and take all homes and factories off gas. They secondly would not accept that our present solar and wind power is intermittent, meaning we need to have back up generation capacity for when the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine. We are often generating a majority of our electricity from gas, wood pellets, and coal.

I reminded them that to make more wind and solar work we will need ways of storing the electrical power generated when intermittent sources do work to use on days when they do not. That may be large batteries. It might be conversion of the renewable electricity to green hydrogen for use in our boilers and vehicles. There might also be breakthroughs to allow gas or coal to be burned in power stations with carbon capture and storage systems to achieve CO2 goals.

The OBR tries to revive its old Remain forecasts

You might have thought official forecasters would have given up trying to prove their wildly pessimistic forecasts about Brexit had a point. After all they said unemployment would rise and it fell, that interest rates would go up and they went down, that GDP would go down and it went up. It was curious that the Bank and Treasury “independent” forecasters, the officials, felt able to publish these pieces. We were told it was fine because it was government policy to stay in the EU so supportive forecasts reflected government wishes. We do not however have them publishing supportive forecasts during a General election, even though Ministers can say it is their government policy for them to get re elected. The officials rightly respect the need for electors to make their own minds up over who to have in government uninfluenced by special official forecasts serving the current government.

I had chosen to remind people of the very inaccurate recent official forecasts of our economy to query some of the policy advice currently being given to Ministers based on strange views of how the economy has worked in the past. I then heard that the OBR has revived a claim that leaving the EU will cost us 4% of GDP. How do they know this? Over what time period? Why doesn't the outcome depend on what policies are now being followed?

The OBR has drawn on other people's work, and it all seems to be based on guesses about trade. They claim trade with the EU will fall and this will cause a fall in productivity which leads to their very precise 4% GDP shortfall. If we lose exports to the EU but at the same time make and grow more things at home to cut imports from the EU that may boost GDP, not reduce it. They do not have to be less productive as they will need modern capital investment and be geared to our shortage of labour. If we bring down our trade deficit overall we could have a stronger economy. The import model within the single market entailed the loss of a lot of UK capacity and jobs.