

Glengorm gas field

Not many people disagree with my argument that all the time we need to burn or use gas as a feedstock it makes more sense to use gas from nearby from our own gasfields than to transport it miles across the oceans of the world in an LNG carrier or to draw on continental supplies that also depend on Russia.

I do get asked how realistic this is, given the way the North Sea is running down. It is true that recent years have not seen the same huge discoveries the drillers discovered in the earlier years of the development of this great resource. It would be wrong to say there is no new gas to find or to produce. Recent years have seen important discoveries made. The Jackdaw field is a substantial find which is ready to develop, with gas pipes running nearby and the Shearwater platform with available capacity to process the raw output.

There is a potential upgrade of Goddard in the southern North Sea, and development of Lancaster as an extension to Hurricane. There are the Glengorm and Glendronach finds west of Shetlands. In total the Oil and Gas Authority tells us over the last three years the industry found an additional 500m barrels of oil equivalent between oil, gas and gas liquids. That was with much reduced drilling.

On top of this is the more contentious issue of the Bowland shales in northern England. So little drilling has been allowed there that estimates of how much gas is available range from a very useful 2.7 trillion cm to a massive and game changing 37.6tcm.

The Conservative Manifesto promised "to introduce new measures to reduce (energy) bills". Encouraging and permitting more exploration and development wells in the North Sea would be a way of helping do this, which would also create plenty of new well paid UK jobs and save all those LNG carbon generating miles of travel.

2022 message

In 2022 the government needs to put the pandemic behind it. It needs to return to its Manifesto promises of lower taxes, the successful implementation of Brexit and prosperity for the many through levelling up. Indeed, the three go together and are mutually reinforcing.

Lower tax rates on earning and venturing are essential to success. The Chancellor needs to sweep away the Maastricht austerity rules that we had to follow in the EU and which he has allowed back in using slightly different language. He needs to grasp that the way to get the deficit down and control

the debts is to promote faster growth with the help of lower tax rates. Set the UK corporation tax rate at the new world base of 15% and the investment and activity will flood in as it has to Ireland with a lower rate than ours. Set the tax on jobs, National Insurance, at a lower rate to stimulate employment. Cancel the new features of IR 35 which penalise or prevent people working for themselves.

Now out of the EU the Chancellor should revise VAT to tailor it to UK policy aims. He should abolish VAT on boiler controls, draught excluder, insulation materials and other green products, The government is trying to encourage people to improve energy efficiency and change their ways of heating homes, so they should not be taxed for doing so. He should remove VAT from domestic fuel for the time being to assist with reducing the cost of living pressures.

The government should take action to restore full GB/Northern Ireland trade, as the Protocol allows. They may need to legislate in the UK to instruct our customs and excise officials to allow free passage of goods from GB to NI where those goods have a clear end customer and destination in the UK. The UK is losing a lot of business and therefore tax revenue from the deliberate diversion of trade to the Republic against the express letter of the Protocol. If we had been doing this the EU and its supporters would be accusing us of "breaking the law!".

The government should make more rapid progress to restore our fishing grounds to UK vessels . They should ban over 100 metre industrial trawlers that are doing too much damage to stocks and the marine environment.

The government should take stronger action, including legislation, to break the businesses of people traffickers and smugglers across the Channel. The UK is spending far too much on rescuing and housing in hotels people who are not genuine asylum seekers.

The government should set out a new subsidy scheme for UK farming which encourages more UK food production, The CAP did a lot of damage to UK agriculture., We need a system which is much more supportive.

The UK government should repeal the EU ports legislation and substitute UK rules that promote thriving ports. They need to be faster and more adventurous with the freedoms for Freeports.

The UK should legislate for its own data, intellectual property and innovation regimes . This is an innovative and enterprising country where some EU rules hold us back.

The government's levelling up agenda is crucial. It is not going to be achieved by a few more trams, better town halls and some extra powers for local and devolved government. It will be achieved by government backing people's personal journeys, removing some of the impediments to success. Excellence in education, more freedom in training, lower taxes on small business, more help with owning a home and a business are what is needed.

Happy new year

“Pour me another, lets toast the new year
Here’s to a better, put fizz in our cheer”

Tonight’s not for sorrows, no mulling old wounds
Come banish our troubles, lets sing some new tunes

Caught in the present is a moment to choose
To look forwards or backwards, to win or to lose

If your comfort is still clinging to what has past
This precious moment of hope will never last

Grasping the future and its so unknown way
Could bring success and many a wonderful day

The past is well trodden, we know the ending
The future is for moulding, shaping, bending

As last year expires, hopes and promises broken
Change things this time , leave pledges unspoken

So pour me another,drink to the new year

here’s to a better, put fizz in our cheer

If your life is a drama you can change the plot
If your friends are the actors you can recast the lot

If people around you are holding you back
Tell them you’re changing, on a new track

Lets hold on to clichés that drive us to more
Lets venture out from behind that closed door

We can stretch for the stars and strive for the sun
We can soar with the wind making life more fun

You are only out of the game when you give up the play
So write some new words so you have a new say

Aim for something better, embrace the best
You may fall short of target but gain from the quest

So cast off the old. Live a new dream
Grab the future foretold. Mine a new seam

So pour me another, lets toast the new year

Here's to a better, put fizz in our cheer

Trust that tomorrow can be better than today
Let the future empower us with its new way

Lets cast off from covid, from laws, test and trace

Lets make our own minds up and set our own pace

The future is only ours, my friend, if we want to race it
Tonight is the night to embrace it

So pour me another, lets toast the new year

Here's to a better, put fizz in our cheer

Improving the UK's Test and Trace System

I have received the below enclosed letter from the Health Secretary about improving our test and trace regime.

Dear Colleague,

Strengthening our testing regime

I am writing to provide an update on what we are doing to strengthen our testing regime in the light of unprecedented demand across the UK.

Testing has played a key role in our response to COVID-19 – we've used testing to find cases, protect those most vulnerable (such as in care homes or hospitals) and to help keep children in face-to-face education.

More recently our testing capability has enabled us to take further steps towards normal life, including by reducing self-isolation periods to re-unite individuals with their loved ones during the Christmas period, keeping venues that would otherwise pose a much greater risk open through use of the COVID Pass and allowed vaccinated people who have had contact with someone who is positive to take daily tests instead of having to self-isolate.

In contrast to many countries, the UK Government provides both symptomatic and asymptomatic testing free of charge, and provides isolation support payments to those who need them, demonstrating our focus on keeping the country running smoothly and avoiding unwanted restrictions (particularly during the festive period where many families come together). To enable this, we are doing more testing per head than any comparable country and we have focused recent communications on encouraging testing before seeing friends

and relatives, particularly those who are vulnerable, over the festive period.

The arrival of the Omicron variant has caused record case numbers and unprecedented demand for both PCR and Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests. This has inevitably placed strain on the testing system, despite the impressive scaling-up of supply, logistics and laboratory capacity. Other countries have faced similar challenges.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, over 350 million PCR and LFD tests have been registered in England (nearly 400 million in the UK), and we now see an average of around 1.5 million tests reported each day. In response to recent challenges, the UK Health Security Agency has more than doubled LFD deliveries from 120 million tests to nearly 300 million in December, more per head than any other country.

To respond to anticipated demand over the coming few weeks we are buying hundreds of millions more LFD tests, bringing new products on board and accelerating their deployment to the public. We are also doubling our total delivery capacity with Royal Mail to 900,000 test packs and PCR tests a day. We are tripling the supply of LFDs in January and February from our pre-Omicron plan of 100 million to 300 million per month.

We are constantly reviewing system performance and ways to maximise its response to the demand for tests. However, in light of the huge demand for LFDs seen over the last three weeks, we expect to need to constrain the system at certain points over the next two weeks to manage supply over the course of each day, with new tranches of supply released regularly throughout each day.

Our daily PCR capacity has also been ramped-up, from around 530,000 per day in November to up to 700,000 per day now, excluding the tests for NHS patients and staff being processed in hospitals. Our world-leading Lighthouse Laboratory Network has and will continue to work 24/7 over Christmas and the New Year to process tests, despite like many sectors being impacted by staff sickness.

We will continue making tests available to everyone who needs them, particularly vulnerable groups such as care home residents and those who work in critical sectors such as the care workforce. Today, for example, there was particularly high demand from care homes with 190,000 PCR tests submitted to laboratories for processing, and these groups were rightly and will continue to be given priority. Everyone who may be eligible for anti-viral medication will be receiving a PCR kit in the post by mid-January, which they can store at home to use if they get symptoms. These will also be prioritised at laboratories.

I would encourage you and your constituents to continue testing when engaging in activities that carry the greatest risk, and before coming into contact with people at risk of serious illness. If people cannot get tests through GOV.UK they should try local pharmacies or see whether their local authority is distributing tests. Tests can also be collected from some community places such as libraries. If your constituent attends or works at a school, college

or nursery they can get rapid tests through these too. I would like to thank your constituents for their continued understanding and patience during this unprecedented time.

Finally, I'd like to thank the men and women on whom our testing system relies. Whether working in the labs, on test sites or in our logistics network, they are rising to the challenge, volunteering to work extra shifts and extra hours to deliver the testing capacity our country needs at this challenging time. We owe every one of them our gratitude.

Yours ever,

RT HON SAJID JAVID MP

[The coming income crunch](#)

It is strange watching a government advance towards a predictable crisis without it taking any of the obvious actions to avert the worst and tackle the underlying problems.

Yesterday a think tank put a figure on the hit to average incomes from tax rises and energy bills next spring. They said it would be £1200 per household. The government did not deny or correct the figure. They said they were spending £4bn on helping people with the cost of living.

Both these disputants might be right. The problem with the government's response is it does not tell the person on average earnings facing the £1200 hit how much of the £4bn they will receive, nor whether this will be additional money or money they are already collectively receiving. It is not an effective counter to any individual complaint to say that the government is spending extra billions on the problem. People want the problem resolved and want to know how it affects them. Taxpayers do not welcome the knowledge that spending has gone up a lot if there is no evidence that the spending is doing good and stopping the problems.

I have been urging the government to take this cost of living crisis more seriously. Much of it can be tackled by government actions. The Treasury needs to cancel its tax rises which will be damaging. Ironically if they help slow the economy too much they might even end up raising less money for the Treasury than not putting the rates up. The sooner they confess their error the better.

The Business department should heed advice on the need to expand domestic gas and electricity supply urgently. It needs to cancel plans to close the remaining coal power stations until we have reliable replacements. It needs to give permission for Jackdaw, Cambo and other oil and gas deposits in the UK. It needs to speed up the small nuclear reactor proposals and consider

commissioning new gas capacity for this decade and next. More subsidies and shuffling around who pays the bills for dear imported energy does not solve the problem.