

Time to grow more of our own food

I notice in my local supermarkets a keen enthusiasm to display the Union flag on many foods the retailer can claim are home grown. There is a marked reluctance to celebrate the EU origins of continental food with an EU flag, or even to put a Dutch flag on the salad items and a Spanish flag on the vegetables that come from there. This makes it a bit more difficult for home grown food enthusiasts to spot the import. It implies the supermarkets think there are plenty of people who want to buy UK food, but not enough who will insist on EU food so they seek to disguise it.

Our time in the Common Agricultural Policy lost us a lot of market share. As recently as the mid 1980s the UK grew 84% of its own temperate food, but this had slumped to 60% last year. The EU did its best to speed the demise of sections of UK agriculture. They provided grants to remove UK orchards to give continental apples and pears a freer run at our market, on the proviso that the farmer could not replant with new fruit trees. They kept our milk industry short of quota, forcing us to import more higher value products like yoghurt and cheese from the continent. Even pro EU John Major went into battle against the severity of their beef policy in response to an unfortunate outbreak of disease.

Now we are free to grow and rear more of our own food we should do so. The Environment Department should make cutting the food miles a crucial part of its green agenda. It should tailor grant schemes to encourage new plantings, investment in mechanised nurture and harvesting, and support for on farm reservoirs and soil improvement programmes. The NFU have raised their standard over the opportunities. The Netherlands supply much of our salad stuff and flowers. They have no weather advantage over us, so we should get on and invest in competitive production with suitable government assistance of the kind they have enjoyed.

It is not a green policy to pay our landowners not to farm our land and then to import our food from hundreds of miles away with the need for so much transport, chilling and packaging to get it to us.

The Business Department needs to promote UK energy to promote UK industry

I attach below my proposal to the Business Secretary:

Levelling up requires the UK to attract and retain more investment in

industry as well as services. One of the main requirements to keep and attract industry is a plentiful supply of affordable energy. This may well in the future be renewable electricity or hydrogen gas made using renewable electricity, but for the next few years industry remains heavily dependent on gas.

This means we either allow more UK gas to be produced and supplied on longer term contract at affordable prices, or watch as more of our industry is closed down and replaced with imports from countries that do have cheaper gas. If you want to make glass, ceramics, paper, steel, cement, plastics or many other products you need gas. Importing it from somewhere else does not reduce the carbon footprint. It usually increases it.

The UK energy policy in recent years has been to close down our coal power stations, to avoid building much new gas generating capacity and to rely more and more on imports. We need Norwegian, Qatari and EU gas in increasing quantities to keep our plants open. When there is a worldwide gas shortage our partial dependence on imported gas at world spot prices causes particular stress. We need increasing amounts of EU and Norwegian electricity.

We compound the difficulties of the steel industry by failing to mine a specialist coal we have in the U.K. and need for steel output. The chemical industry of course relies on oil and gas feedstock for much of what it does, but we have not allowed sufficient production and a close working relationship between the energy industry at home and the chemical industry. Germany has a larger chemical industry without a home gas and oil industry which should have placed it at a disadvantage but Germany does cut energy prices for industry and relies on a lot more coal in the total mix.

Shouldn't we trust the market more and grant the permits for UK exploration and development of domestic oil and gas? Wouldn't that reduce CO2 by cutting dependence on imports from coal based systems like Germany and China and from the extra transport it takes to bring the goods to us?

[Newsnight](#)

Some of you say you want to know about media engagements. This morning BBC Newsnight invited me on for tonight. They wanted to know if I was happy to talk about energy or the Northern Ireland Protocol and I said Yes, either or both. Chasing them this afternoon for the details they then said they had changed their mind and cancelled it. No idea why, as I would imagine they would have to follow at least one of those stories.

Visit to Floreat Montague Primary School on 24 September 2021



I visited Floreat Montague on Friday 24 September. I met and talked to a number of pupils, and was hosted by the Chairman of the Board John Hutt and the Headteacher, Patrick Pritchett. Councillor Gregor Murray from the local ward who is also a parent joined the visit.

There was an initial discussion about raising standards and the ethos of the school. I praised the use of synthetic phonics as the best way of encouraging good reading and writing at an early age. I also discussed the way project work around stated themes or tasks can be used to allow pupils in a class of varied abilities to participate fully and achieve good outcomes. I was pleased to see the school's emphasis on kindness and engaging with all pupils.

During the tour of the school a couple of boys were energetic in their enthusiasm for football, and most engaging over opportunities for them to play and to follow Premier League teams. There was a Question and answer session with four of the older pupils selected for the task of interviewing me . I asked them to comment on what they most liked about their school, on what improvement they would like to see and which lessons or activities engaged them the most. The pupils asked about electric cars, charger points, plastic waste in the oceans, sustainability and cycleways. I explained government policy and my own thoughts in line with the views set out on this website.

I was grateful for the welcome to Floreat Montague, and pleased to talk to pupils about their lives in the school and about their interest in issues affecting the local community and the wider world. I wish the school every success as it expands, completes its exciting history mural project and enriches the lives of all pupils who pass through.

If gas is dear you need more of it or a better alternative

The Business Secretary was the Energy Minister, and is now the boss of the Energy Minister. His disagreements with the Treasury over whether he can offer any subsidy to hard pressed manufacturers need not prevent him helping the energy using industries very directly. He should invite them in with the gas supply industry and the UK gas producers and discuss how going forward the UK can produce more domestic gas to reduce our reliance on erratic and currently very expensive imported energy.

An industrial user of gas that needs plenty at a competitive price to make steel or glass or paper or ceramics wants some reassurance that going forward they can obtain enough gas at sensible prices to be able to keep their customers. If the government allowed the UK gas industry to find, produce and deliver more of the gas that is available in our islands and seas they could offer more long term contract gas to domestic industry on sensible terms.

The Minister could explain to the green lobby that this is a greener answer as well. It makes little sense to bring gas compressed by use of energy around the world in large tankers needing a lot of diesel to power them to our shores, when local gas could pass down a pipe for a fraction of the power needed for the import. If something is too dear you either need more of it or a substitute. There may be other ways of making steel and paper in due course, but for the time being if we want to save our industries they need cheaper gas.