

[Honda Leaves Swindon – a cameo of our time](#)

The immediate reason why Honda is closing its Swindon car assembly plant is the lack of demand for its cars throughout Europe. The company's sales in Europe peaked in 2007 at 313,000 and is now under half that. Contrary to referendum rumours their closure has nothing to do with Brexit. They are also ceasing production in Turkey and do not want any production in Europe for the future.

The second reason is the EU/Japan trade deal. The prospective ending of 10% tariffs on imported cars from outside the EU will make Japanese produced Hondas in future 10% cheaper. Why not make them in Japan and get greater economies of scale from manufacturing there where they need output for the home market as well?

Which brings me to the third reason. Honda needs to launch new models that are all electric for the market of the future. This requires a complete rethink on how you make cars and where you make them. Honda will put its battery capacity into Japan and get the economies of scale there for the European market production at the same time.

This Honda story is a warning to the UK and to other established centres of car production in Europe. The transformation of the car means new plant and new equipment and may well mean a different pattern of industrial location as a result. Brexit was never a threat to the UK car industry. Electrification is. For the UK to keep its current level of capacity and to grow its industry it needs to take bigger strides to invest in and control the raw materials, component production and assembly of the electric cars of the future given the determination of the USA, EU and UK governments to force this transition. Until enough people freely buy electric cars this means the industry investing in advance of demand and government offering suitable assistance to help make the new products more affordable and acceptable to customers.

Meanwhile the Honda factory will become warehouse space. Let's hope it will not just be filled with more imports.

[President Biden drives the EU to a more aggressive foreign policy](#)

President Biden's more diplomatic approach towards the EU comes at a price. Last week the USA persuaded the EU to put its name to sanctions against Chinese officials and to make a statement condemning China's treatment of the

Uighur Muslims. The EU had been negotiating an Investment and Trade Agreement with China, and had been careful not to criticise China's approach to human rights. The 5 Eyes grouping of the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand had been more outspoken and Australia had borne the brunt of Chinese denials, rebuttals and complaints.

The US Secretary of State also made it crystal clear that the USA remains implacably opposed to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany, despite it being almost finished. He stated it was a "bad idea" for the EU as well as for her western allies. He added to Trump's strategic criticisms the added criticism that the project gets in the way of EU climate change objectives as well, a new US sensitivity which the EU is meant to share. The USA under Biden has more time for allies, but expects them to rally round a new aggression towards both China and Russia. President Biden dislikes these states. He alleges they undertake state sponsored cyber disruption, interfere in western elections, fail to uphold human rights for all and are building up their military power whilst creating a series of client states. The German model of doing plenty of business with Russia and China is being put under some strain. For her part China is testing out both Biden's power and the cohesiveness of the western alliance. The trends are clearly towards a US led system and country grouping, and a Chinese led one. Biden's team are trying a tough public stance on political matters, whilst trying diplomacy to settle some of the trade issues with China in private. I would be interested in your comments as well on where the UK should now position its foreign policy towards China.

[Restore our freedoms](#)

Yesterday I was one of a few MPs who voted against a six month extension to the powers of the Coronavirus Act. I did so because I wish to hold the government to its promise of an end to lock down this June. I did so because I think the powers are too sweeping. We need to restore our liberties and let people make judgements for themselves about their conduct and their health risks. I did so because I do not think government can protect us from all harms, and has to avoid taking so much action against one threat that it leaves us vulnerable to other threats.

I and others will continue to question and to seek to persuade the government to remove this raft of restrictive measures. Without the Official Opposition also opposing we lack the votes to change things, but we have voices and public support which we need to represent.

The UK's migration proposals

I reproduce below a letter sent by the Home Secretary to all MPs and peers, as I thought it best you read the government's statement and respond to their proposals:

New Plan for Immigration

We have today published the New Plan for Immigration – our landmark programme to deliver the first comprehensive overhaul of the asylum system in decades.

UK asylum claims increased by 21% to almost 36,000 in 2019 – the highest number since the 2015/16 European 'migration crisis'. Small boat arrivals to the UK reached record levels with 8,500 illegal arrivals last year.

At the same time, our ability to remove individuals with no right to remain in the UK is being undermined by repeated legal claims designed to impede removal action, often strung out over a period of many years. The vast majority of last-minute claims designed to prevent removal are subsequently found by the courts to have no merit. Shockingly, there are around 45,000 failed asylum seekers who have not left the UK and over 10,000 Foreign National Offenders – and yet there were just 7,000 enforced returns in 2019.

All of this impacts our ability to help those in genuine need by taking up scarce resources and wasting valuable judicial capacity.

We have already reformed our legal immigration system by ending free movement and introducing a new points-based immigration system. This plan is the next step in taking back control of our borders by tackling illegal immigration.

Our New Plan for Immigration has three main objectives:

1. To increase the fairness and efficiency of our system so that we can better protect and support those in genuine need of asylum;
2. To deter and prevent illegal entry into the UK, thereby breaking the business model of the criminal trafficking networks and protecting the lives of those that they endanger; and
3. To remove more easily from the UK those with no right to be here.

At the heart of this plan is the principle of fairness. Access to the UK's asylum system should be based on need, not on the ability to pay people smugglers.

For the first time, how someone enters the UK will impact on how their claim progresses and on their status in the UK if that claim is successful. As we clamp down on illegal immigration and abuse of the system, we will also streamline the asylum framework to prevent repeat claims which frustrate removal, including of dangerous Foreign National Offenders.

We will increase prison sentences for those illegally entering the UK, introduce life sentences for facilitation of illegal entry, give Border Force

additional powers, strengthen age assessments and introduce a more robust statutory definition of “well-founded fear of persecution” for asylum purposes.

At the same time, we will enhance our reputation as Global Britain, strengthening our safe and legal routes for refugees and fixing historic anomalies in British Nationality law.

The proposals are fully compliant with our international obligations, including the European Convention on Human Rights, the Refugee Convention and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

These reforms are explained in more detail in the policy statement, which we have published today. To inform the proposals set out and ensure we can deliver effective change across the system, we have also launched a public consultation and a wide-reaching engagement process. We will use this opportunity to listen to a wide range of views from stakeholders and sectors as well as members of the public, followed by legislation at the earliest opportunity.

You can find the policy statement and consultation portal at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration>.

I look forward to hearing your views on our New Plan for Immigration, and hope that you will strongly encourage your constituents to take part in the public consultation so that the voice of the public is heard.

[My Speech during the Second Reading of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill, 23 March 2021](#)

Of course I welcome the idea that we should do everything we can to promote greater science and better technology. Our country has a fine history and tradition of scientific breakthroughs and scientific excellence in our universities and our scientific societies. We also have a fine tradition in technology, with entrepreneurs developing new industrial processes and new products and making great breakthroughs that have benefited humanity widely, and of course we should do everything we can to support that. There may well also be a gap that this body can fill between all the methods we have of backing science and technology, and I wish it every success.

In his introductory remarks, the Minister pointed to the recent great success of universities, companies, medics, scientists and Government in coming together—here and elsewhere, but particularly here—on the AstraZeneca-Oxford

vaccine. Why did that work? Because there was a very clear, defined task. There was great excellence and expertise already in companies and university science, and the Government helped to bring that together, to pump-prime the process and then to provide very large orders, as did other Governments and health services around the world, to make it worthwhile and to defeat the virus.

Now, we hope that do not have too many of those concentrated needs, but that model worked without ARIA, so this body has to define something a bit different from that. I notice that MPs are already discussing the adequacy or inadequacy of its resources, by which they usually mean money. I do not think it is possible to have any idea of what would be a good and realistic budget for it until talented people have been appointed to run it and have set out what it is trying to do. The first thing the Government need to do, therefore, following the success of this legislation—I am sure it will pass quite easily—is to appoint really great people to lead this organisation who just have that feel, that touch and that intelligence to judge risk, to sense opportunity, to see where the niches are and to define the unique breakthroughs and areas where this body can make a serious contribution. As some have said, a scattergun approach is probably not going to work; trying to do too much across too broad a spread would require a lot of good fortune. This body will need some targeting.

ARIA then has to work out how it commercialises whatever it produces. The UK has had a century or more of plenty of breakthroughs and technical innovations, but in quite a lot of cases we did not go on to commercialise and exploit opportunities, and we allowed others around the world to adapt patents or take the underlying principles and develop their own products, making many more jobs and much more commercial success out of these things than we did. The leaders of this body therefore need to ask how they will commercialise the ideas, how big a role that will play, and at what point they will work with commercial companies that could come in and take advantage.

That leads on to the issue of security. I do not think British taxpayers want to spend more money on blue-sky research and interesting technical ideas only to see them taken away, perhaps resulting in many more products for the Chinese to export back to the United Kingdom. What we want is that integrated approach, where the ideas that the Government have helped to pay for through this body, working with universities and perhaps with companies, can go on to be commercialised and add to the stock of wealth and jobs and make a wider contribution to the human position.

I suggest that the Government link the development of this body to the work that they have started to do, and they need to do much more widely, on national resilience. I am an admirer of what President Biden has set out to do in the United States of America on supply chains. He has a very ambitious programme—a 100-day programme for targeted sectors and a one-year programme for all the sectors of the US economy. It is looking at what America can do better, at where America needs to fill in gaps in her knowledge and understanding of patent, designs and specifications, at where America needs to put in new capacity to avoid shortages or more hostile powers interrupting

her production processes by withholding import, and at where the Government machine can use intelligent procurement, appropriate grants and interventions to work with the private sector to have a much better supply chain, creating more jobs and providing national resilience.

I hope that the agency will look at what we can do to ensure that we make our weapons and defence requirements, as the new policy suggests that we will do more often. It should look at how we can grow more food and make sure that we have more of our own fish so that we have fewer food miles and more national resilience in the food chain. It should look at a series of industrial areas where we have in the past been very successful to see where we can improve the technology and add to the UK capacity to produce.

My suggestion to Ministers is that the first task is to get really excellent people; the second is to work with them on defining realistic and achievable objectives; and the third is to ensure that the agency is properly resourced—£800 million might be the right amount, but if the agency comes up with really worthwhile things that look as though they will work, we will want to back it with more money. If it was not getting very far, I think a number of MPs who say that they do not mind failure would become rather more critical. This will need quite a lot of ministerial and parliamentary supervision. I wish the agency every success, and I look forward to hearing to more detail about what it is trying to do.