

Oxford lecture on the Digital and Green Revolutions

On Friday 8 th March at 11 am I will give a public lecture on The Digital and Green Revolutions. Tickets can be obtained (free) from www.asc.ox.ac.uk/event/GDR24. All Souls College, High Street, Oxford.

The British Business Bank makes big losses

Last year the taxpayer owned British Business Bank lost us £147 million. Its auditors said it can carry on trading because taxpayers will send it enough money to pay the bills.

609 staff were paid £60 million between them. Senior staff accrued more long term incentive bonus. Nice job if you can get one.

The taxpayer did get a long report on how they comply with a wide range of requirements. It revealed their investments in a bookshop, a beauty business, an electric forklift business and various other fashionable areas.

The taxpayer now has put £3bn at risk in this outfit. If we had used that money this year to cut the state borrowing we could have saved £120 m of interest instead of losing £147 m.

There is no evidence the state sector is any good at this type of investment banking. There should be no wish to saddle taxpayers with more losses. Sell the whole thing off as soon as possible.

The Rochdale by election

The Rochdale by election was a most revealing event.

Labour did not campaign and announced no-one should vote for their candidate on the ballot paper as he was unsuitable. Most people expected Conservatives to poll poorly in line with other recent by elections. The current mood of the Conservative half of the electorate is to send a clear message to the PM to improve things, by abstaining or voting for a different candidate.

These then were the ideal conditions for Reform, or the Greens and the Lib Dems to mount a great campaign and show momentum. Labour the obvious party to win here was not running.

The Greens with their extreme approach to net zero demanding so many changes in lifestyle came in ninth with just 1.4% of the vote. The Lib Dems who also want to stop people using cars and speed green changes came in fifth with just 7% of the vote. There is no evidence here or in other elections that voters want more of the net zero policies.

This surely was ideal territory and background for Reform. There was speculation they could even emerge the winner. In the event they limped in in sixth place with 6.3%.

Instead the Conservatives were the only established party to get into double figures in third place. Rochdale voted decisively for two independent candidates who got 61% between them.

People want government to improve the economy, boost take home pay and control our borders. The sooner it is seen to do so the sooner voters around the country could get behind the government again. There is little appetite for Green/Lib Dem and Reform's negative aim of destroying the Conservatives is not a big vote winner either as it does nothing to improve people's lives.

My kind of green

I have always been a lover of the countryside. I admire the fields and woods of England. I have argued for less development of greenfields and for more kindness to animals.

I have campaigned for lower migration as I cannot see how and where we will build three cities the size of Southampton each year to provide homes, shops and roads for 750,000 extra people. I look forward to this government tightening the rules further to cut the numbers more.

Reducing growth in population is essential to bring housing supply and demand into better balance. It is crucial to bringing UK CO₂ output down. If you want net zero emissions net zero migration would be a good start. It is central to keeping more balance between town and countryside. It is crucial to improving our local food production as we need to keep the farms we have.

I favour planting more trees. Time was when we grew our own timber. Now we import vast quantities from places where softwoods grow more slowly and use large amounts of energy to be brought here. Our new mixed woodlands should be for timber as well as enhancements for our countryside.

I favour more reservoirs. A few extra lakes can enhance the landscape and

offer recreation . We are short of water if we get longer hot dry spells. We have not expanded water stores as the population has grown.

I favour much more investment in modern agriculture. Fruit and vegetables can be grown in bigger quantities with modern protection against the weather and good control of water and fertiliser.

Net zero

Some people writing in want me to challenge the idea behind net zero policies. They believe the climate is not warming, or they believe it is but this is not brought about by manmade CO₂. They query the climate models, pointing out past times when the models have not forecast correctly. They ask why the models are based on one main variable, manmade CO₂, and do not seem to encompass solar intensity, cloud cover and water vapour, earth seismic activity , natural CO₂, and other possible influences. They wish to dispute with the scientific establishment who claim the science is settled and that only a major reduction of man made CO₂ can change things for the better.

I have no intention of doing this. Those who want to need to find other sites and other authors. I intend instead to concentrate on the areas I know best. My challenge to established governments' thinking is to the idea that the current range of policy proposals to drop world CO₂ will deliver their exacting targets any time soon. They very clearly will not, and in some cases the proposed remedies land the world with more CO₂ than without them.

The main things I will continue to question are

1. The accounting system which says if the UK cuts its CO₂ production by importing energy and energy intensive products instead of extracting and making its own, this is helpful. It clearly increases world CO₂ by at least the amount of the extra transport. If you import LNG instead of producing your own piped gas it is a big increase in CO₂.
2. The fact that whatever the UK does to its small amount of world CO₂ the targets will be met or missed by the actions of China, India, the US and the other large CO₂ emitters. China and India plan to increase emissions this decade, and India well into the next decade making it very unlikely world targets will be hit by 2030. Those most worried about this need to turn their protests to China and India.
3. Electric cars are very CO₂ intensive for their manufacture and for the extraction of the raw materials and the production of their batteries. They need to be driven many miles before there are CO₂ savings compared to keeping your old ICE vehicle. If you recharge an EV drawing power from fossil fuel power generators as many do there is clearly no gain.
4. Heat pumps are very expensive. They require a lot of disruptive and CO₂ intensive work to remodel and insulate a home before installation. They may not give a good result. They too do not help if the country has

too little renewable power available to fire them.

5. The world is embarking on a wide range of different technologies – carbon capture, hydrogen, electrical drive, battery storage, pump storage, synthetic fuels other than hydrogen. There will only be a swifter transition when a few of these are scaled up and become cheaper, leading to wider adoption. The big array puts many people off early adoption, waiting to see what will attract the most subsidy to start and what will become more economic as it grows.
6. The green issues need to be balanced with security of supply , affordability and practicality of product. Many green products for transport and home are a work in progress which is why they are not selling in huge numbers. More work is needed to produce great value products that people want.

In summary for this revolution to take off most people need to change the way they travel, heat their homes, their diet and the products they buy. This will only happen when there are better green products on offer that people want to buy.