

How can I make a difference to the green agenda?

A young constituent graduate came to see me to ask how the government and I can guarantee that we will look after the environment. He sought the usual assurances which I could give that all EU environment laws will be translated into UK law by the Brexit Act. Thereafter improvements will be made only following extensive Parliamentary debate and votes. He also wanted to know what the government was doing about transport and power generation, as he feared the emissions from these sources.

I explained that the government has undertaken a substantial programme of coal fired power station closures and has intervened heavily in the market to get more wind power and new nuclear. This will of course entail dearer electricity, which transfers energy using industry to other countries at our expense. I myself think we need to combine better fuel saving with cheaper power to help create and sustain industrial and agricultural jobs here in the UK. The government is currently proposing legislation to facilitate more electric cars, is promoting electric and intelligent technology for vehicles, and wants the UK to be a leader in green technology businesses. I would also like us to make more of our own goods and grow more of our own fruit, vegetables and flowers around the year.

He was still concerned and wanted to know what he could personally do. I suggested as a graduate chemist with a current job in an engineering business he should see if he could join or set up a green business that supplies us with things we want. The way to conserve fuel is to sell a range of products and services to us to cut fuel use in our homes. It is to promote fuel saving components in our vehicles, and to concentrate on reducing dirty emissions which are causing air pollution. Much green development is commonsense. I want a more fuel efficient car. I want a better insulated home. I want a more fuel efficient boiler. I welcome fuel saving appliances as long as they work well. There is much more we can do within existing technology, and scope for many more technical advances.

This was not the answer he was expecting. He said he had more in mind campaigning for a greener world. I said I did not think we were short of politicians and green campaigners urging us to use less fuel. I thought what we were short of was practical business people helping us in our homes and cars to save energy and cut our bills. Anyone with a business model that could do that would help customers and save the planet at the same time. I did point out the one big thing as a politician I am trying to do to protect some of our green environment is to promote new trains and signals that would give us a big expansion of train capacity without having to build new train lines. The danger of some green legislation is it can drive energy using business offshore and raise our cost of living without achieving at global level the stated aim of the policy. We want smart energy use, not dearer energy.