

Letter to Defence Secretary

Dear Ben

I am writing in support of more UK procurement of defence equipment in general, and about naval vessels in particular.

The MOD has promised to reboot the competition to acquire three supply vessels in the Fleet Solid Support Programme. This would be a good opportunity to add them to the list of vessels that are put out to tender for UK shipyards. I appreciate we need to increase the UK capacity and competitiveness of ship yards, but we will only do so by offering them a more sustained workload. The MOD did buy the large tankers from foreign yards recently which missed an important opportunity.

I was pleased to see the UK taking delivery of 5 Offshore patrol vessels, and inviting proposals for renewal of smaller patrol vessels for Gibraltar. As we move to take control of our fishing grounds at the end of this year, and need to reinforce our border policing against various types of crime, we will need more offshore patrol capability.

Building back better should include expanding the UK's maritime capacity, creating many more opportunities for UK jobs and skills. It will provide a bigger taxable base of good employment in the UK, and is also necessary for our defence. It is important not to rely on imported spares and service for naval vessels or other strategic defence equipment.

Yours ever

John

The language of the left

People complain to me that they can no longer say what they wish. They feel they are losing their right to free speech or to independent thoughts. They have to follow the fashionable mantra of the left who dominate language and attitudes on law and order, immigration, transport and energy amongst other topics. They were hoping for some change of tone or lead from the top with a change to a Conservative majority government at the last election.

Some people try it on with this site, wanting to cast generalised allegations against religions, nations, large groups of people or named members of a global elite. I do not allow it, as I do not like unpleasant or dangerous language casting possibly false allegations and adding to divisions. Nor do I have time or legal resource to check out allegations against named

individuals. There are campaigning media with better resources and more appetite to root out individual cases of law breaking, excessive influence or whatever you should go to for that.

I do, however, agree that we need to be able to talk sensibly about matters that worry people, and need to analyse problems like the cost and availability of energy or how we police our borders, free from attempts to prevent us by making false allegations against us over our motives and attitudes. We need to keep open the right to talk of these things and to disagree with the authoritarian left who wish us all to say the same things and to come to the same conclusions, when often their priorities and remedies are damaging to both our freedoms and to people's prosperity.

If we are to recover our economy, enhance our freedoms, level up around the UK and promote individual prosperity, we do need to challenge some of the left wing assumptions which make all that more difficult. I encourage people to write in with a better vision of the future. That is why, for example, I have been working on energy policies to keep the lights on and provide more affordable energy for consumers and business, and why I have been urging the government to direct its powers to stamp out people trafficking and illegal migration risking lives to get people into the UK. We do need new approaches to a variety of problems that challenge the tired soundbites of political correctness.

GDP figures reveal big decline in public service output and rise in public sector inflation

Two of the biggest sector falls in the economy in the sharp recession last quarter were health and education, owing to the impact of the virus on their ability to work. The ONS decided they delivered 34.4% less education and 27.2% less healthcare. These are bigger falls than the economy as a whole. Because public spending rose sharply the ONS also decided there was a very fast inflation in the public sector. They calculated public sector inflation or the rising cost of government at 32.7% "because the volume of government activity fell whilst at the same time government expenditure increased in nominal terms". The overall deflator "the broadest measure of inflation in the domestic economy" as a result shot upwards.

Restoring health and education output is a very important part of the recovery policies the government is now following. Of course the government needs to ensure safe working for all employees as the schools and surgeries get back to full working and the non Covid work of the hospitals builds up again.

Ministers intervene in exam grade appeals

Overnight we have news that Ministers have reviewed the actions of teachers, Examining Boards and the independent regulator. They have decided that a good ground for appeal can be the mock exam results where these were achieved in properly controlled conditions. This means an individual will have a way of upping their grade where a combination of teacher assessment and Examining Board moderation has delivered a lower grade than the mock exam result.

Taxing development

The government wants to speed more housebuilding, but it also wants to tax development. It proposes a new infrastructure tax to replace the existing system.

It is true the gap between land values with permission to build homes and land values for land without any building permission is huge. It is also true the wider community incurs large costs from more housebuilding. There needs to be more schools, surgeries, roads, power lines, broadband cables and the rest. All parties have accepted the idea that there should be some infrastructure levy or contribution to public sector infrastructure costs, just as securing private sector services may entail direct payments to the service providers. The government does not mention the need for compensation payments to existing homeowners, though there are clear cases where the amenity and value of their property is hit by more traffic and noise, worse views etc. Developers who want speedy progress sometimes offer compensation to reduce opposition to a scheme.

The Section 106 payments system has been a negotiation between Councils and developers. Many Councils have wanted to take the money to build more homes for rent instead of using the money to build the roads, schools and surgeries needed. The sums have expanded to try to accommodate both needs. The government has also introduced an additional Infrastructure levy.

The new levy proposed is only set out in outline. It is national with maybe a single national rate or rates. It might also have regional or local variations. It seeks to flex according to land and home prices, allowing developers to make a given margin before the levy kicks in. In falling markets the levy would fall and in rising markets it would rise. That is a sensible feature.

I would urge simplicity and suggest a per house levy to cover the obvious public sector infrastructure costs. The government wishes to increase this tax, which will make achieving more home building more difficult.

Given that many people want fewer new homes with reduced migration, what do you think would be sensible by way of a tax on new developments?