

Letter to the Health Secretary

I would like to follow up on my questions to you concerning the search for treatments that help CV 19 patients. You rightly replied that a number were in clinical research under your Recovery Trial, as well as with the WHO's Solidarity trial and elsewhere. It was good news that Dexamethasone was shown to have helpful effects for some serious cases.

How are the trials both in the UK and abroad going for

1. Other immune moderators and Interferons?
2. Anti virals including Remdesivir and Hydroxychloroquine?
3. Anti coagulants?
4. Convalescent plasma?
5. Vitamins C and D? 6. Nitric Oxide, zinc and Ozone?

Some of these treatments some doctors say might be best used in the early stages to prevent the disease taking hold, and some may have beneficial effects in serious cases needing oxygen treatment, as with Dexamethasone. Clearly finding more ways of combatting the different features of the serious versions of the pandemic would be of great help in taming it.

Your stated policy of getting the NHS back to work on everything not related to CV 19 is now crucial. New contracts with the private health Sector should be based solely on buying stated procedures, treatments and operations for patients on the NHS waiting list. Buying capacity with no known patient in mind will be wasteful and will not incentivise the NHS to use the private capacity fully, as we saw during lock down.

It is also important that the policy of handling CV 19 cases in isolation hospitals or in clearly sealed off units in District General hospitals is properly enforced and advertised so patients are not put off attending surgeries, clinics and hospitals to have other serious conditions treated. With best wishes to you in getting the NHS fully back to work after the heroic efforts made by some to tackle the dangerous and difficult CV 19 surge.

Stopping illegal migration

As there is great support from many writing in for this, why not set out your proposals for the Home Secretary in your postings as she clearly shares this aim.

The new Planning system

Let us welcome the idea of a simple map setting out general uses for land in each designated area of a Local Plan. Let us also agree the government needs to cut inward migration and prevent people trafficking.

The government suggests 3 categories on a map. One is Growth, the second is Renewal and the third is Protection. Growth implies more or less any development is fine in principle, though subject to design and density requirements to be set in the Local Plan. Renewal we are told implies rebuild, change of use or some "gentle densification". Protection implies keeping areas green with little or no building.

Maybe the government should look at three other use categories instead. They could demark land for housing, land for commercial development be it retail or industrial estate, and land for green gaps, farming and outdoor leisure for sports fields and other green spaces. I am all in favour of eroding the current complex uses classes and allowing greater freedom for building owners to flex from retail to homes or to industry. There do need to be special controls on the location of industrial businesses or leisure businesses that create noise or other nuisance, so they do not conflict with housing areas. Adjusting their categories, they could make it clear Growth includes employment sites as well as housing sites, whilst Renewal might like to stay more in keeping with current uses and styles of development.

The big issue to be resolved is the process of forming the Map, and the extent to which local wishes will be fully reflected in the results. The present system is deeply distrusted and disliked for the simple reason that the compromise which is a local Plan is soon broken by appeal decisions, forcing fast growing communities to absorb more housing development than they wanted. In communities that lack growth and investment the same process fails to lift the area to attract the new people and new investment they need to boost living standards and enterprise.

There is enthusiasm for levelling up both in the fast growth areas suffering from too much building, and in the slow and no growth areas desperate for new investment. How will this new system level up? What does it bring to the areas without investment that will drive a better distribution of building around the country? The government needs to make sure this is not just a new variant of systems to increase the pace of housebuilding in areas that are already relatively well off.

Support for jobs, incomes, and businesses in Wokingham

I have received this update from the Government:

Dear John,

On 8 July, I set out the government's next step towards economic recovery and securing the UK's long-term prosperity in our Plan for Jobs. As we embark on this next phase, the latest figures demonstrate that we are continuing to support jobs, incomes, and businesses across every corner of the UK.

- As of 02 August, the government has helped 1.2 million employers to furlough 9.6 million workers and as of 19 July has supported over 2.7 million self-employed individuals across the UK.
- As of 30 June, in England more than 7.6 million jobs had been supported under the furlough scheme and 2.2 million self-employment claims had been made; in Scotland, 736,000 jobs had been furloughed and 155,000 self-employment claims had been made; in Wales, 378,000 jobs had been furloughed and 108,000 self-employment claims had been made; and in Northern Ireland, more than 240,000 jobs had been furloughed and 76,000 self-employment claims had been made.
- As of 02 August, Bounce Back Loans have been approved to 1.1 million small businesses, and over 58,000 loan facilities have been approved through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme.
- In the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors and via the Local Authority Discretionary Grant Fund, as of 05 July 2020, over an estimated 902,000 business premises in England have received grants worth up to £25,000, and approximately 373,000 ratepayers will pay no business rates for the whole of 2020-21. Nurseries in England will also not pay rates for 2020-21.

In Wokingham, the government has supported:

- 13,500 workers furloughed through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (figures up to 30 June);
- 3,600 self-employed people through the Self-employment Income Scheme (figures up to 30 June);
- 1,602 local businesses through offers of government-backed Bounce Back Loans, whilst separately supporting local businesses through offers of 71 government-backed Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme facilities (figures up to 02 August);
- 551 local business hereditament in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector and 24 nurseries that will pay no business rates this year (figures up to 05 July);

- 1,043 local business hereditament that have received cash grants of up to £25,000 (figures up to 05 July).

The government has done the right thing helping people and businesses through the pandemic and we are continuing to support them as we come out of it.

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

Chancellor of the Exchequer

[The Planning White Paper – the faults of the current system](#)

There is much to support in the Planning White Paper. I have long advocated a map based approach where each area designates which places are to be green space or farms, which can be developed for housing and which have general commercial use. Speedier decisions, Local Plans only one third of the current length and a simpler approach to an Infrastructure levy or contribution on developers are all welcome.

The present system is complex, expensive and frustrating to developers and local communities alike. It often does not allow a local community to protect areas from housing development if they are not specially designated as Green belt or SSSIs. Whatever the Local Plan says, determined and well funded developers hire expensive lawyers and keep on with appeals and changed submissions until on national appeal they overturn the local Plan and get their way with a further planning permission. Developers have to allow for many years of battles, have to pay big fees to planning consultants and lawyers and enter a variable negotiation over developer contribution.

Local Councillors often are dragged from seeking to protect a piece of land from development which is not designated for development in their approved local plan, by the appeals process. They seek a deal with a determined developer on the advice of their planning officers. They are told if they do not do a deal the Council will lose out on a Section 106 Developer Contribution Agreement, as they will lose on appeal and one may not be awarded. They are also told they may land the Council with large planning and legal fees trying to defend their local plan, only to lose and have to explain why they wasted all that money.

The Councillors who give in then become very unpopular with the local community who sometimes suggest unreasonable collaboration with the developer, when in most cases it is the run of official advice and the likelihood of loss in the system that causes the about face. The local community wants the Council to defend green spaces and keep local communities apart from continuous urban sprawl.

The government wishes to hit high targets for future housebuilding. As the White Paper acknowledges, the problem is often poor build rates despite large numbers of outstanding planning permissions. Landowners and developers can game the current system by building slowly on land with approvals in order to persuade Planning Inspectors to allow more planning permissions where the local community wants to keep green space. The government should also as part of this policy exercise improve its control of our borders and set a sustainable figure for economic migrants as past Conservative governments did or promised to do, to ease some of the development pressures.

In future blogs I will look at more of the detail of the proposals in the White Paper in preparation for putting in my response to this consultation document. I look forward to hearing from constituents in particular about how this might affect us in Wokingham and West Berkshire.