

Wokingham Borough consults, ignores, then blames someone else.

The Lib Dem Council refuses to accept responsibility for the chronic waste of money and the bad scheme for California Crossroads. Conservatives opposed this scheme, seeing its unpopularity when listening to public opinion. This Council approved it and decided to spend £5.5 million on it.

Lib Dems complain that as MP I did not regularly criticise the Council when it was Conservative controlled. That was for two reasons. The first is it was better run. The second is the Council invited me in or to zoom meetings with the Chief Executive to go through matters of common concern for the public. I had regular email and phone exchanges with the Leader so I knew what was going on and could influence it. I could work closely with the Council where they needed help from the government. When the new Lib Dem Council was elected I accepted an invitation to a preliminary meeting. I offered them the same behind the scenes support I had offered the previous administration. I said I would take up any sensibly argued proposal that needed government support or money. They have subsequently failed to take these offers up. I do not receive briefings about their financial condition, for example.

Despite this lack of normal co-operation I have taken up things I assume they want without their help or information to back my case. I have successfully persuaded the government with other MPs with similar problems to drop the top down housing targets that require too much building. I have explained this and urge the Council again to put out a local plan, as this is crucial under the new approach to offering protection to areas we do not want developed. They have failed to do so.

I have helped get more money for potholes. I want to see action using the enlarged road maintenance budget as there is a big rash of potholes.

I have helped get more money for social care, as this was an area in need of more funding.

I have helped get two new SEN schools where we need more provision.

I have offered public advice to the Council to not cut back spending on grounds maintenance and decent proper street cleaning and drain clearing. I have supported continuation of weekly bin collections.

I have helped get a substantial uplift in the main grant to the Council and in the totals including a range of other sources of public money.

It is a new low in Lib Dem propaganda to argue I want sewage dumped in our rivers. The government has set out proposals with the water industry to increase pipe and processing capacity which has to happen to handle increased volumes. In the meantime before the bigger pipes have gone in the choice is between letting the sewage into rivers or it backing up and polluting our

roads and homes.

Instead of scaring people about the financial position when they inherited a strong one with £120 million in balances the Council should get on with the task of providing value for money and spending on the peoples priorities. It would be a good idea if next time they hold a consultation they drop or amend their unpopular plan instead of ploughing on with it regardless as they have been doing all too often so far.

A lack of energy

The government says it takes energy security seriously so it encourages more wind and solar. Opposition parties want a faster run down of the gas and coal power stations that have been keeping the lights on, and query biomass at Drax. This would destabilise us more.

On Sunday demand was about one third below peak but we were dependent for than a quarter of our electricity on imports. This is alarming and shows the dangers to security and self sufficiency from premature fossil fuel plant closures and undue reliance on intermittent renewables.

If government insists on more renewables it first needs to get someone to put in massive investment in some combination of

More grid capacity

Large battery stores

Conversion of power to hydrogen and its derivatives

More pump storage

Government claims renewables are cheaper than gas generation. They do not usually allow for the extra grid and storage costs, or for back up power. If this were true then some of the cost gain has to be spent on storage and transmission.

If it is as some expect that fully costed renewables are dearer government needs to tell us the extra costs and explain who pays.

Given the delays in rolling out hydrogen and large battery with extra grid it is probably necessary to add more combined cycle gas capacity for the transition. This is what Germany is now thinking of doing.

It is quite wrong to be so dependent in imports. It loses us jobs, costs us tax revenues, puts big strains on our balance of payments. The EU is energy short, so it is very dangerous to rely on imports from them.

The ideas that we can muddle through with insufficient power on low wind days rests on two dangerous assumptions. It assumes everyone will accept a smart meter and accept the use of differential pricing to shift power demand away from peaks when renewables are low. It assumes many more people will own an electric vehicle and will be prepared to plug it into their home and run down the battery to heat and fuel the home when renewable power is scarce. Many people are resisting having a smart meter as they do not like this idea. Most people are not ready to buy an electric car or cannot afford one, and few are volunteers to have one to act as an adjunct of the national power supply.

UK trade with EU

The Remain politicians always claimed leaving the EU would damage our trade in goods with the EU. I and others pointed out that as our trade was so heavily skewed to imports and as we are both members of WTO trade would not suffer.

Remain insisted on locking us into a so called Free Trade Agreement, but still moaned that trade would be down as it would not match membership. This seemed bizarre.

So what has happened?

Since the vote in 2016, and since final exit early in 2020, our trade has increased with the EU. There is nothing on the chart to show a Brexit hit.

Exports were £37 bn in Q 3 2016 at the time of the vote. They were £38.8bn in Q1 2020 as we left. They have now risen by a fifth to £46.2 bn.

Imports were already at a high £60.8bn in Q3 2016. They were at £59.3 bn in Q1 2020 but soared to £77.8 bn in Q 3 2023. This is a rise of 30%.

The bad news is we are still running a big trade deficit in goods with them as we did all the time we were in the EU. It shows the need for better policies to promote home grown food and fish, more domestic energy and more UK manufactures.

To leavers it was not about trade. It was about making our own decisions and spending our own money. The biggest wins so far are saving our large financial contributions, not having to agree to help repay Euro 800 bn of new EU borrowing, and avoiding another 7000 laws.

Reflections on the Cambridge debate

There were meant to be four lead speakers on each side. Those proposing belief in the United States of Europe did have four senior people. Two were former UK MEPs, one was the founder and co-President of a pan European party, and one was a fellow in European Politics at LSE.

The Opposition had myself and a Professor who was sceptical about the feasibility and desirability of the USE. Two able students joined us. I was the only one of the four who thought Brexit a good idea though I had no plans to raise that. The others all wanted to raise Brexit, so that was 7 against 1.

Whilst it was an improvement on the referendum debates that the pro EU side did not deny a United States of Europe is a possible and desirable outcome, I was struck by their lack of detail. There was no blueprint for how the remaining tasks to build the bigger budget and larger tax base might work, how big the army need be, how and when the EU/USE would take responsibility for its own defence and how and when it would create peace in Europe. There no exploration of how and when the EU growth plan would work and whether it was impeded at all by member state differences. There was plenty of hatred for Putin's Russia and of a Trump led USA but no diplomatic path for better relations with these powers. The advocates clearly want a USE in Cold war with Russia and with the USA if they do not approve of its President.

Much of the tone of the debate was very narrow in attitude, repeating well known general platitudes about unity, democracy, solidarity with no understanding of how far the current structure is from delivering this.

There was no attempt to respond to the facts and figures I gave them on the huge gap between the US and the EU over growth, per capita GDP and for the growth of great companies. When I highlighted the importance of the great US digital corporations it led to hostility to capitalism though all these people do depend on Microsoft, Apple, Meta, Alphabet, Amazon Web and Nvidia to lead their own lives and to get their degrees. Their approach like the EU is to rely on US companies whilst condemning them.

Will the new intelligentsia wake up to reality? Europe has a lot of catching up to do. The world does not owe it a living. There is a huge gap between the high ideals they assert and the reality of what the EU is doing.

The Cambridge Union debates a United

States of Europe

I offer below a speech I could have made on Thursday night at the Cambridge Union. I spoke spontaneously and was not given enough time to say what I wanted. This recreation captures some of what I said then and adds a bit.

This House should not believe in a United States of Europe

It is good to see that some eight years after we had our great debate about whether stay in the EU on its journey to ever closer union Cambridge wakes up to what the argument is all about

It would be quite a turn round for Remainers in the UK to believe in a United States of Europe.

They spent the last 50 years telling us the EU had no such plans.

It is just a single market they told us.

We will not lose more sovereignty they said .

Successive federalising Treaties were tidying up exercises., Nothing to see here

It is true I never believed them.

It was always clear to me the aim was a United States of Europe.

I could hear it in the speeches of many on the continent who were more honest about their direction.

I could read it in the Treaties themselves as they set out on their course of ever closer union.

We went from common market to single market

We went from European Economic Community to European Union

We went from the Treaty of Rome to the Treaty of European Union via Maastricht, Lisbon and Amsterdam.

The aim was always to create a United States of Europe

Many wanted to rival or outshine the United States of America

Today I can tell you there is still a gap between plan and reality.

I know both the USA and the EU fairly well.

I have travelled and worked in both.

I can assure you that for all its federalising and centralising

The EU is no United States of Europe in the way the USA is the United States of America.

Let us look at some of the differences

The USA has a powerful President elected by the voters of the whole nation

The EU has five Presidents jostling for authority. Not one of them is elected by a pan European electorate.

If any government in the world wants to talk to the USA, they ring the President in the White House.

Who are they meant to ring if they want to talk to the European Union?

If the USA wishes to meet a foreign country at senior level the President meets the Head of the other state.

If the EU wants to meet they often send a couple of their Presidents who argue over who is senior

The USA backs its foreign policy with the world's most powerful army, navy and airforce.

The EU's small forces cluster under the NATO umbrella and rely on US protection

The EU says it promotes peace

So what went wrong with its interventions in the Balkans?

How is it promoting peace in Ukraine?

The EU claims to be democratic

In Poland the new government is busy locking up Ministers from the government of 2007 despite a Presidential pardon

Germany has put the AFD Opposition under surveillance

The EU backed Spain in sending Catalan nationalist politicians to prison

The EU seems happy with stopping critics of its scheme from standing for election

The European Parliament has no organised Opposition saying the EU's policies are wrong and offering an alternative

The EU says it promotes free trade

Yet it is slow to reach agreements with other countries

And quick to impose protections at home

The EU's idea of a single market is

Laws telling everyone what they can make and how they can make them

No wonder innovation withers

All they needed was the simple rule that if you sold a product in your home country

Then you could also offer it for sale in any member state

The EU claims to foster a digital revolution

So how come all the world's main technology companies are in China and the USA?

The EU claims to be good for growth

So how is it that the fifteen largest quoted companies in the world are all American – yes 15

How come the USA has outgrown the EU so much in recent years?

US GDP has now hit \$80,000 a head

That almost double the EU's \$41,000

Time to ask who has the better model for growth?

Where the USA gives us great digital innovations and services

The EU taxes and fines US companies for daring to supply what the public and business want

The USA creates an exciting 21st century of opportunity and investment

The EU is stuck in the last century worrying that innovation brings threats

The EU wants many to buy battery cars

Pity they will largely be imported as China corners production of batteries

The EU poses as kind to migrants and asylum seekers

Yet it and its member states have been in recent years busy building more border wall and fence than Donald Trump

The EU promotes trans European networks.

All the time we were in the EU no trans European train turned up at Wokingham station

Whilst HS 2 was ground down by cost overruns and extreme delays

The EU's energy policy has left it short of energy and facing high bills

Germany's bad decision to close all her nuclear stations did not help

The worse decision to build pipelines to make themselves dependent on Russian gas followed

The EU has a great idea to put in more solar and wind energy

Such a pity China will supply much of the kit

Meanwhile the EU has not worked out how to store renewable power when plentiful

Or how to use electricity in planes and trucks

The USA under Biden as well as Trump carries on drilling for more oil and gas

So they can send gas to Europe to keep the lights on

The EU's farming policy became so hostile to producing food

That a Dutch government fell because of it

The EU fishing policy is great at allowing supertrawlers to Hoover up far too much fish

Damaging fishing grounds and sea bed

The Euro is the jewel in the federal crown

The chosen means to complete the Union

It has been a currency in search of a country to love it

Now the EU is making progress with the common budget, common taxes and common borrowing a USE needs

The Germans agreed to the Euro on grounds that it would take a tough anti inflation stance

They wanted no return to currency printing and debasement that so damaged Germany 100 years ago

In recent years the ECB did turn to money printing and ended up with high inflation

Germany agreed to monetary union on the basis that all states would need to keep their debts and deficits down.

Those rules are now suspended and most countries are way over the borrowing limits

One of the main constraints on fast progress to complete the United States of Europe is the huge costs it will impose

The EU itself is trying to overcome the cash shortage by its own huge

borrowing spree

It aims to add a short trillion euros to EU debts

Which will fall to be guaranteed by the member states

The EU is a long way off commanding the mighty resources of the USA

The Euro is still no match for the dollar

As the EU worries about its defence and security, worries about its long and exposed borders, worries about its cash need, worries about where to find extra tax revenue from highly taxed people the US storms ahead with the digital revolution

I warn you

Do not be a small business in the EU – they will regulate and tax you too much

Do not be an entrepreneur in the EU – they will make innovation difficult and impose high taxes

Do not be a believer in freedom in the EU as they have a law for everything

Do not believe the emerging United States of Europe will outshine the USA

History tells us the attempts at European unions fail

The Holy Roman Empire broke up

The Scandinavian union broke up

The USSR broke up

To say nothing of the forced unions some European countries sought to impose on others that caused so much harm and loss of life

So EU

You do want to be the USE

But you are nothing like the USA

Why would anyone believe in this lopsided underfunded over regulated legal

structure?

That is no new successful country

It is the comfortable well paid redoubt of an elite that is fast losing it with many voters.

Yours sincerely