

July 4th – is this freedom day?

Today there will be restaurants, cafes and pubs open. More life will return to town centres and village streets after the long hibernation.

Some businesses are very positive. They have worked hard to come up with compliant models for doing business, and are hopeful customers will return. They desperately need support so some cash flows through the tills to start paying some of the bills.

Others are worried. Some still are banned from opening at all. Some have permission but do not see how they can make their model work, given limitations of space in their premises and the demands of social distancing.

Today I would be interested to know the reactions of my readers to this partial relaxation. Will you hit the town to buy a coffee or have lunch out? Do you want to visit the pub? Will you eat or drink in doors, or opt for the garden choice if the weather allows?

The government is worried in case too many people rush to the centres and fail to keep some distance between them. The businesses are worried in case a cautious public stays away in large numbers, leaving the hospitality businesses with all the costs of their new set up and not enough revenue to justify it. It is your town or village centre we are talking about. Those who want to save them have to use them. Governments cannot subsidise them indefinitely to serve too few people.

Back to school

Yesterday the government set out its wish for the schools to return to educating all eligible children from September.

This is a vital task. Children need the benefit of life in the classroom and in groups for break times. Well taught lessons and the competitive edge of others around them can lift their learning. Whilst many parents have done a good job with home teaching and supervision their children have still missed the stimulus of their friends and classmates. Teachers know the curriculum and how to prepare students for public exams.

It is also the case that some children get more help at home than others which can increase inequalities and unfairness. Parents too will benefit as many need to concentrate more on home working for their jobs, or need to go to work rather than child minding.

The new rules end the idea of social distancing between all in a class or

bubble, but keep the different groups apart. We're CV 19 to enter the school the aim would be to isolate the children in the affected bubble and keep the rest of the school open, unless testing suggested it had already spread further.

Some schools have done a good job with Remote learning. Progress should be made with getting all up to standard as it can be a useful adjunct or stand by to classroom face to face work.

My intervention during the debate on the Finance Bill, 01 July 2020

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the importance of jobs. Is he worried that the reform the Government have in mind might mean that a self-employed person working on their own in one of our constituencies could lose a contract to a foreign company, because the big company undertaking the contract might think that was safer?

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I am not sure about the part of the right hon. Gentleman's intervention that referred to foreign companies, but the turbulence of the labour market right now does pose a danger to contractors. The Government have already recognised that to some degree in the delay announced for this measure.

Withdrawing support schemes at the same pace for all sectors does not recognise that some sectors are in far more difficulty than others, and that is particularly true for any sector based on the idea of people gathering closely together. Many sectors such as transport, aviation, sport, theatre, music, and others, are global British strengths, but right now they are on their knees.

Dropping the social distancing rule from two metres to one metre is not enough when, in some cases, any kind of social distancing is impossible. Let us take live music, for example, which is based on the very opposite of social distancing. The break-even point for many venues and events is often being 80% to 90% full, and the change to one metre will not make that much difference to them. We need an approach that takes into account the different impact on different sectors.

Measure it if you want to manage it

On Tuesday I raised the issue of management information with the Chancellor of the Duchy, the Minister in charge of the Cabinet Office. It's an unusual subject for Parliament, as it is sadly neglected. Political argument often proceeds based on a few statistics. The numbers become friends and enemies to the disputants, and may be imperfectly understood or even misleading.

Large departments of government like big companies need managing. The CEO or Permanent Secretary needs a few general figures to monitor the main trends and outcomes. the numbers need to accurate, consistent and informative. In the Benefits department figures on delays and error rates for example matter and should trigger action from the top when they wander too far from decency. In the NHS success rates for treatments and waiting times are an obvious couple of concerns. Value for money also should figure with a way of capturing unit costs.

This high level information is also important for the Cabinet Minister in overall charge. Government produces masses of numerical information . The. Art is finding within it the relevant information for any person's level of responsibility.

IR 35 and the Loancharge.

I supported moves to get a rethink on these two difficult tax issues yesterday evening , but was on the losing side on both occasions.