

## Food and trade

On Wednesday I had booked slots to speak on the Amendments to the Agriculture Bill about trade, and on Third Reading where I wished to discuss how we promote more home grown and home reared food. I joined the debate remotely and listened to it, only to discover they had booked more slots than available spaces. I was not called on the Amendments, and the 3rd Reading debate lasted for 3 minutes, front benches only. So let me tell you some of what I wanted to say. My views are being sent to ministers as well.

I want us to have more free trade agreements and high standards of food production. I see no need to accept food from countries with unacceptable animal welfare practices, nor to lower our standards in order to secure a Free Trade deal. More importantly, the government has promised it will not dilute our current standards. Free Trade Agreements with other countries will need Parliamentary approval and will be properly reported and debated in the House. It is common in Free Trade Agreements to respect each other's regulatory systems through the doctrine of equivalence, where there is possible. Where it is not then the trade continues under WTO rules.

The government has decided to keep certain EU permitted practises for the time being, though one of the wins from leaving the EU is we can impose our own higher standards where we wish. We will, for example, continue with rules which allow chlorine wash of salads and vegetables. The EU disagreement over chlorine washed chicken is not with the chlorine washes which they accept. Do those who object strongly to US chicken wish to see us ban chlorine washes for other items?

The government is pledged to maintaining levels of financial support to farmers that they were receiving under the EU policy, but to spend the money differently. The Bill grants powers to allow the government to support investment in better food production and requires the government to consider and report on food self sufficiency levels. I want the government to have ambitious plans to promote much bigger output of fruit, vegetables and flowers here at home by providing financial and regulatory support for more greenhouses and more mechanised market gardening. We also need to recruit more local labour to help with this important industry.

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## The future of pubs, hotels and tourist attractions

As the lock down drags on, so the summer season will rush by. We need to ask what does the future hold for those who have invested their lives and savings in small hotels, B and Bs, pubs. clubs, tourist shops and attractions.

If the climate remains hostile to larger gatherings of people for July and August as well as May and June, the summer season will be badly damaged for these supporting businesses. In areas of great beauty or historical interest small businesses depend heavily on the summer income to see them through winters of low volumes or partial closures. Visitor numbers are often driven by access to festivals, sporting events, great houses open to the public and magnificent scenery which is best in sunshine.

It is possible for many of these businesses to survive for the time being. They can put their staff on furlough. They can get some delay on taxes and rent. What they cannot do is go a whole year without the higher revenues of summer. They need a clearer picture of what July and August might bring, when government is cautious as it depends on success with limiting the spread of the disease.

It is also a question of what business model can these enterprises come up with to be compliant in an age of social distancing. How realistic is it to run a restaurant with 2 metres between diners? Can screens be used instead? How do people get served drinks in a pub without a jostle at the bar? How many people can a small hotel or B and B handle whilst keeping people apart and keeping common areas free of virus from the occasional infected person who is unaware of their condition?

The long decline of the High Street will be accelerated by recent events. So might we end up with fewer pubs and fewer tourist businesses. How long can a firm keep workers in furlough before there has to be revenue earning employment or redundancy?

I would be interested to know how you would respond to some relaxation in these areas? Would you go to a pub or restaurant if they opened soon? What changes would you want them to make to handle the virus? Would you consider a week-end break or a holiday somewhere in England later this summer?

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## [West Berkshire Recycling Centres to open](#)

I have received this update from West Berkshire Council:

West Berkshire Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) are set to reopen to allow residents the opportunity to dispose of waste and recycling that cannot be safely stored at home. This follows publication by the government of updated guidance indicating that visits to recycling centres can be considered essential under certain conditions.

From **Thursday 14 May** both of our recycling centres, which are located at Newtown Road in Newbury and Padworth Lane, near Aldermaston, will be

reopened. The sites were closed temporarily on 24 March following announcements by the government of lockdown restrictions. In order to manage demand, a **booking system** is in place and you will not be able to simply turn up at the recycling centres.

**The booking system will be live on the morning of Wednesday 13 May and residents need to book their appointment here:**

<https://citizen.westberks.gov.uk/clickandtip>.

When the recycling centres reopen, and to stay within the government's Covid-19 guidelines on essential travel, please remember that journeys to these sites during lockdown should only be made if waste cannot be stored any longer at home without causing a risk to your health and safety. The sites will be open seven days a week from 9:00am to 6:00pm, with the last booking appointment available at 4:30pm.

Working with Veolia, who are our waste contractors, precautionary measures will be introduced to help maintain social distancing on our sites for our residents and staff protection. We will also implement a robust traffic management plan which will help us minimise impacts of traffic congestion on the local road network and to control the number of visitors to the site at any one time.

Residents need to book an appointment and be prepared for the possibility of long queues. We are advising delaying a visit until things are a bit quieter in a few weeks' time or to only visit if you cannot safely store waste at home for the next couple of weeks. Our kerbside waste collections for recycling, rubbish, the garden and food waste subscription scheme and chargeable kerbside bulky waste collection service is still operating normally and residents are advised to make use of them, wherever practicable, in the meantime.

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The experience of visiting our household recycling centres will be different and you should only visit the recycling centres if you cannot safely store your waste at home.

**Please ensure you:**

- Have booked an available appointment online: <https://citizen.westberks.gov.uk/clickandtip> – this will be available from Wednesday 13 May in the morning.
- Check [online](#) to see if all waste materials can still be taken to the site.
- Check the site layout when loading waste into your car. Use these site maps to help you when packing your vehicle: <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/recyclingcentres>.
- Check [travel times](#) and any restrictions in place. Please arrive at your allocated time that you have booked online and not any earlier. There may be delays accessing the site and possibly queues of waiting vehicles. Please bear with us as we work safely on the site to limit

contact between people.

- Have your permit, or ID and proof of West Berkshire address with you.
- Have a copy of your booking confirmation with you – either a print out or on your phone.
- Only bring what you can physically carry as we are operating a one person per car restriction – our staff cannot help with your waste when you are unloading your vehicle. Under exceptional circumstances only, and at the sole discretion of site staff, two people may be allowed to leave the vehicle to dispose of the waste e.g. if they are removing a heavy or bulky waste item.
- Please follow the instructions that site staff will give you and also be polite to members of staff.
- All residents visiting the site will need to observe the social distancing measures in place by keeping at least 2 metres apart at all times.
- In line with Public Health England guidance, residents who are vulnerable, or who are showing symptoms which may indicate coronavirus, should not visit household recycling centres.

For more in-depth information, please read our [FAQs](#).

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## [Getting out of the furlough](#)

The government yesterday confirmed there would be no abrupt end to the furlough scheme to help pay to keep workforces together and ready to return to work. The Chancellor also accepted the advice of many of us that it needs to be more flexible, allowing part time work for the employer by some of those in furlough with appropriate reductions in financial support.

We await the details of the extended scheme, which could last until October. It is important to help businesses keep a workforce together who are banned from working by law. Such a business needs a grant, not a loan, as it cannot help itself by earning revenue. This money can be borrowed by the state, with the burden spread over many years ahead. Clearly there are limits to how long this can go on, as the state cannot borrow for a long period to keep a workforce together that is not allowed to earn its own income. It is now equally important that there is a path back to work for these enterprises.

There will be hard cases. Where businesses that were viable in areas like hospitality face delay before they can resume working, the risks of eventual redundancies are higher. Where this is compounded by those businesses expecting to have to operate at much reduced levels of sales owing to the social distancing rules, they may end up with a business which cannot pay its way let alone make a profit. It is difficult to know how many cafes,

restaurants, hotels, pubs and clubs will re open with a way of doing business that can pay all the bills. Clearly keeping a 2 metre distance between customers and staff is going to prove very difficult in many of the properties and locations previously used for such activities.

I am glad that some of these businesses have already shown great enterprise and flexibility turning to take away meals, looking at how they can use gardens and other under used spaces to spread customers out and introducing screens or other barriers to allow closer spacing.

None of this is good for the recovery of the High Street. Rents and business rates remain high, when we need adjustments to the new reality of reduced earning power in many places.

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## Changes to Operations of Schools and Other Education Providers

I have today received this update from the Government:

Dear John

Today I am setting out in more detail how we will support early years, school and further education settings to welcome back more children from 1 June at the earliest, if we are able to do so safely.

You will have seen the Prime Minister's video address on Sunday where he confirmed that we are now past the peak of the virus and he set out a roadmap for careful modifications to social distancing measures. Now that we have made progress in reducing the transmission of coronavirus we anticipate, with further progress, that from the week commencing 1 June at the earliest we may be able to welcome back more children to nurseries, schools and colleges.

We will only do this provided that the five key tests set by Government justify the changes at the time, including that the rate of infection is decreasing and the enabling programmes set out in the Roadmap are operating effectively. As a result, we are asking schools, colleges and childcare providers to plan on this basis, ahead of confirmation that these tests are met.

It is now seven weeks since we closed schools, colleges and childcare settings to all but priority groups – vulnerable children and those of critical workers. This has been a huge ask of teachers, parents and especially of children themselves, and the response has been incredible across the board. But we all know that the best place for children to be is in school and it has always been my intention to get them back there as soon as the scientific advice allows. Children returning to educational and

childcare settings in greater numbers will also allow more families to return to work.

From the week commencing 1 June at the earliest, I will be asking primary schools to prepare to welcome back children in nursery, Reception, year 1 and year 6, alongside the priority groups currently at school. I will ask secondary schools, sixth form and further education colleges to offer some face-to-face support to supplement the remote education of year 10 and year 12 students who are due to take key exams next year, alongside the full time provision they are offering to priority groups.

We will also ask nurseries and other early years providers, including childminders, to begin welcoming back all children from 1 June. Alternative provision settings should mirror the approach being taken for mainstream schools and also offer some face-to-face contact for years 10 and 11 students (as they have no year 12). Special schools, special post-16 institutions and hospital schools should look to achieve an equivalent phased return without a focus on specific year groups.

Our ambition is to bring all primary year groups back to school before the summer holidays, for a month if possible, though this will be kept under review. We will only welcome back additional year groups if the most up-to-date assessment of the risk posed by the virus indicates it is appropriate to have larger numbers of children within schools. Keeping children and staff safe is our utmost priority.

Our approach is underpinned by our latest understanding of the science, which indicates that we need to take a phased approach in order to limit the risk of increasing the rate of transmission above 1. We know that attending early education lays the foundation for lifelong learning and supports children's social and emotional development.

The three year groups within primary have been prioritised because they are key transition years, and the two year groups in secondary/colleges have been prioritised because they are preparing for key examinations next year. This approach is in line with other countries across Europe, who have begun to bring pre-school and school-age children back in a phased way and are focusing on primary schools and younger children. Approaches between countries will vary slightly based on different public health circumstances.

We are continuing to limit the number of children returning so that settings can reduce the number of people in classrooms compared to usual and put protective measures in place to reduce risks. Children and young people will need to stay within their group wherever possible and we will ask settings to implement a range of protective measures including frequent cleaning, reducing 'pinch points' (such as parents dropping children off at the start and end of the day) and utilising outdoor space.

In early years settings, existing space requirements and staff:child ratios for these age groups should allow for small group working. Staff and children in all settings will be eligible for testing if they become ill with coronavirus symptoms, as will members of their households, and the track and

trace approach will be applied to any confirmed cases. Those who are extremely clinically vulnerable, or are living with someone who is, are not expected to attend. Anyone with concerns about underlying health conditions should follow our protective measures guidance.

Public Health England is clear that if settings implement these protective measures, and crucially if they also apply comprehensive infection control measures, such as ensuring symptomatic individuals do not attend settings, regular hand washing, respiratory hygiene and cleaning measures and handling potential cases of the virus as per our advice, then the risk of transmission will be lowered.

I will assess the impact of these changes closely, working with medical and scientific advisers as well as sector leaders. We will provide the sector with further guidance and support to help them to prepare for wider opening over the coming days and weeks. Today we have published the following pieces of guidance:

- Actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June;
- Supporting guidance on protective measures which should be implemented in education settings;
- Guidance for parents and carers.

I want to thank the House for supporting schools and other providers in your own constituencies through this incredibly difficult time. I know that I can rely on our education and childcare sectors having the full support of the House as we prepare for this wider opening.

Our education leaders are central to the country's response to this current crisis. I hope you will join me in thanking all those who work in our education and care settings for their efforts.

**Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP**

**Secretary of State for Education**