

Flood alerts

The Environment Agency has put a flood alert on the Emm brook but said they do not expect any property flooding in our area.

I have worked with the Agency and the Council on schemes to reduce flood risk. A lot of building has taken place on low lying land which can increase the pace of water run off swelling rivers and streams. Some remedial action has been taken, but more is needed.

When we get a lot of rain as recently it is a reminder that if new development goes ahead on low lying sites there needs to be substantial action to ensure safe water run off at a pace local water courses can accept without spilling above their banks.

Keeping watercourses and drains for surface water clear helps. In some cases when there is too much water it does need to settle on open land away from homes in the way water meadows used to work before all the building.

Migration

I see the Home Secretary is pledging to cut net migration once we leave the EU, bringing freedom of movement from the EU into the UK to seek work and related benefits to an end. Other parties in the election wish to continue with EU freedom of movement.

The numbers need working out in detail when we leave. The government will be happy to welcome students to UK universities, highly skilled workers to well paid jobs, and lower paid workers to important areas with low domestic availability of labour. There is talk of an agricultural worker scheme for example. The plan is to have a fair system for evaluating demand for Labour and eligibility for applicants.

The important thing is we can decide and control the process. There will also continue to be a fair system for helping refugees.

Total numbers need to be sustainable and give plenty of opportunity to people already legally settled here to get available jobs.

More jobs and lower inflation

This week has brought good news that unemployment is at a 45 year low. Although slowing, the economy is still generating additional new full time jobs. Pay is rising at 3.6%, usefully faster than price rises at 1.5%.

The combined effect of job availability in most places with rising pay means people can afford to spend a bit more. Pressures on budgets ease when pay rises by more than prices, and when people get promotion or move to better paid jobs.

It has been a battle to get the state deficit down from the unsustainable Labour levels of 2009-10 to something we can afford. It has taken time to reduce the high levels of unemployment the government inherited in 2010.

There is nothing wrong with some borrowing, both for individuals and for companies. Buying your own home usually entails accepting a large mortgage. 20-25 years later you own the home with no more mortgage or rent bills to come. Buying a car with a loan or lease arrangement also makes sense as most people do not have the cost of a car in their savings account. If you have a job and a stable income the car is affordable.

Similarly successful companies can borrow to finance their stock or work in progress, or to finance capital equipment they need to produce their goods or services. A sensible level of borrowing can help their business and enhance returns for their owners.

Some query the need for the state to borrow. Under the new rules the government will only borrow for capital investment. Where the government borrows to deliver a service which the customers pay for, it can be a commercial return like any other. In most cases the state will be offering the service free to the user, paid for out of taxes. This makes evaluating the return more difficult. It does not mean there is no return or no need for necessary capital spending on roads, hospitals or schools. The government has to assess the outcome sensibly.

A green agenda

It is commonsense to save energy by investment in insulation and fuel efficiency in heating systems. It is a good idea to improve the fuel savings on vehicles and to find less fuel intensive ways of travelling.

It is important to our quality of life that we protect and enhance the natural world around us. We need to protect woods and fields from development where possible, and make sure we look after the beauty of the landscape and

the countryside beyond our cities and towns.

The government does run grant systems to allow people on qualifying benefits to insulate their homes with a grant, and to replace old heating boilers with modern more efficient ones. There is money available for loft insulation and wall insulation. It also makes sense for those of us not on benefits to make improvements in our own homes. Cutting the future fuel bill is a good idea. Modern boilers can be much more efficient than old ones Blocking off draughts and stopping heat leakage through walls makes sense.

We can also improve the fuel efficiency of our transport. More people are choosing to walk or cycle for shorter distances. New vehicles can be considerably more fuel efficient than older ones.

We can also cut down on food miles. One quarter of the freight miles travelled on our roads is carrying food around. Some perishable food coming long distance is flown in. If we choose more local produce or seek out the British label we can reduce the travel cost of our food and the impact that has on the environment.

Public and private sectors

Some contributors seem to think the public sector cannot add to national output or incomes. This is not true in either accounting or real terms.

A person attending a private school is paid for out of fees. Their education adds to national output. A person attending a state school has a similar education but their parents do not pay directly. It has a similar effect on national output to the private school place. The state provision is as much output as the private sector and is paid for out of taxes.

There could be a productivity effect. If in a particular activity public sector or private sector productivity lagged then the total economic impact would be affected accordingly. In the case of schools private schools may well have higher staff ratios to state schools.

When the UK had a lot of nationalised monopolies producing energy and transport we had an efficiency problem in those sectors. In those cases privatisation led to an improvement in productivity, which was possible to bring about because people accepted the principle of paying for use out of their own incomes. Market pressures encouraged adoption of better technology and more efficiency.