

Heathrow consultation

I attended the Heathrow consultation at Parliament this week. I renewed my lobbying concerning excessive plane noise when the wind comes from the east following changes to flight routes in 2014.

The airport said they would be consulting again about the noise issue later this year and were working on ways of abating noise. They are looking into steeper ascent and descent so planes are higher for longer and at whether they should revert to the previous routes which did not produce such concentrated noise for Wokingham. I asked them for a written statement for me to share with constituents over how they will seek to mitigate the noise problem.

Environmental lobby 26 June

I agreed to meet constituents coming to the environmental lobby today. In the end only one came for the meeting, but we had a good conversation with a number of positive ideas.

My constituent raised the issue of too much plastic getting into the oceans. I explained how the UK government was leading the charge to try to cut plastic use and to stop so much ending up in the seas. The UK can do more to substitute degradable materials for plastic, and cut down the presence of single used plastics dramatically. We can also improve enforcement of laws against litter to ensure more waste is properly contained and processed by our domestic and commercial waste systems.

I was asked about motorcycle noise. I agreed to look in to standards and controls over noisy bikes. The problem of fast bicycles not using bells to warn pedestrians of their presence was also a matter of concern.

I was shown a number of containers and plastic cutlery items where better design and different materials could make a difference. I agreed to pursue with Wokingham Borough what more they can do to offer green leadership by their own purchases, I explained that the new leadership of the Council is seeking to pursue greener policies and are currently reviewing just these matters. I agreed to write to them encouraging a review of the Council's practises to offer good leadership on recycling and the use of suitable materials.

VAT increase on solar panels

Yesterday the government pushed through a tax hike from 5% to 20% VAT on solar panels. They did this to comply with EU law. I did not support them.

What is it about Mrs May's government that they are so wedded to the EU? We are leaving. We do not need to set our taxes in the ways they demand any more. The government says it wants to be more green, so why on earth make it more expensive to generate solar power?

I want a Brexit budget. That budget should include taking VAT off all green products like insulation, boiler controls, draught excluder and solar panels.

TV licence fees

Some constituents have written to me to complain about the BBC's wish to limit free TV licences to only those over 75 who are on a low income. This is clearly out of the spirit of the agreement with the government which gave the BBC the right to levy a higher tax to finance itself as long as it paid for free TV licences for the over 75s.

I am taking this matter up with both the BBC and the government. I think the government should apply more pressure to the BBC to honour the pledge made.

The EU's agenda for greater union – conclusions of the European Council 20 June

The EU is busy trying to fill its senior positions without success yet. They meet again on June 30th to try to reach agreement over who should be President of the Commission.

The EU Council last week revealed its new ambitions to take more control from member states.

The EU wants member states to press ahead more rapidly with plans to decarbonise. Countries are being pressed to lower their CO2 output, to increase their renewable generation of power and raise their fuel efficiency.

2030 targets are being set, but the EU has still not agreed on a zero carbon target for 2050 which some wish to do.

The EU is keen to weed out fake news from social media. It will be interesting to see what they regard as fake news, and to see if they start to cross the line between unacceptable material and censorship of material that is inconvenient to the EU. It is setting out a new "framework for targeted restraint measures" which will include asking social media platforms to prevent material harmful to the EU.

The Euro area needs to consider how much further it should go with a joint budget and whether it will start to borrow money in the name of the EU to spend around the union. The Euro area meeting talked of intensifying the banking union and capital markets union. There is also a wish to have more common taxation under a policy that it should be "fair and effective".

The EU wishes to take greater responsibility for its own security and defence, pointing the way to more common defence spending.

The EU wants to become more assertive in international affairs. It wants Russia to release the captured sailors from Ukraine and release the vessels, seeks free maritime passage there and wants Russia to reduce her influence in eastern Ukraine. The EU continued its sanctions against Russia. The EU also condemned Turkey for her alleged illegal drilling in the Eastern Med.

The EU is planning a tougher migration policy "to fight illegal migration and human trafficking and to ensure effective returns". The detail on who they will make go back will be interesting, and what their enforcement mechanisms will be. They want to renegotiate the Dublin Regulation which requires a member state to offer safe haven to a migrant if that state is their first place of arrival in the EU. The southern coastal states resent this obligation on them.

We await the new Commission and new Parliament. The old one goes out with a set of conclusions that aspire to much more integration but lack real bite in achieving their full stated aims. Nonetheless the process of integration continues, with the EU using its position in international affairs and negotiator of international treaties and commitments to gain more control over member states policies in everything from defence to energy and from economics to media.