

Manifesto time

The Lib Dems tell us we need to re enter the EU single market. Do they read nothing? Have they not seen the data of how our growth rate slowed after we joined the EEC, and slowed again after 1992 when they “completed” the single market?

When we entered the EEC customs Union in 1972 they took tariffs off their successful goods exports to us, but did not take barriers down for our service sector exports to them. Predictably our balance of trade with Europe plunged into the red and stayed there. The rules, tariffs and taxes helped their exports to us much more than our exports to them. We had to ditch trade with Australia, New Zealand and others as they made us impose tariffs on the food they sold us, to substitute Euro food instead.

They then bamboozled a weak U.K. establishment into eventually joining the Exchange Rate Mechanism. A few of us pointed out the damage this would do. It predictably gave us an inflationary boomlet followed by a bad bust. Needless EU economic damage.

The EU all the time we were in failed to agree a trade deal with our biggest overseas country market , the USA . It failed to enter the important TPP Pacific trade area which we have now joined once out of the EU.

The EU used the excuse of the single market to make us adopt all too many new and additional laws, burdening business with over the top costs. These laws often impeded innovation and made you do something as the EU leading company did it.

As Single market Minister my main task was to stop, delay or dilute needless and undesirable laws. As a result of their inward looking protectionist anti innovation approach EU per capita GDP is just half the US level. Locking us into that again is a very bad idea. Lib Dem’s are neither liberal nor democratic. They want to deny us the result of the Brexit referendum. They want more and more laws and taxes to restrict entrepreneurial and business freedom.

Great Western Railway

On Friday I inflicted a journey by rail to Cardiff and back on myself.

GWR spent a fortune on designing and buying very uncomfortable seats. They have little padding and a severe back angle. They quickly give you back ache. The HS 120 seats they replaced were more comfortable .

I had a pre booked seat on my ticket. Once again the seat booking system was not working on the outbound train. Fortunately there were some seats. The train had been cut back to just five coaches. It did run to time which was an

important bonus.

On the way home they cancelled one train. My train arrived late and was crowded thanks to the cancellation which had left many people waiting on the platform. The train continued to run late.

Car parking was expensive at Reading. Getting a taxi back to Cardiff Station required making an advance payment to a taxi firm, a new hazard. Fortunately the taxi did turn up to honour the contract. Overall it was an expensive way of travelling with plenty of car and taxi diesel as well as the electricity for the train on a day of little renewable power. Far from green.

The lack of flexibility with the ticket meant I had to get the train specified even though I could have made an earlier one which would have had more space.

The train controllers in Whitehall need to relax their controls more, or take a more intelligent interest in why potential users of the railway have poor experiences. Uncomfortable trains can be remedied. Inflexible ticketing can be changed, Poor timetabling to manage demand can be optimised without cancellations. Much more thought needs to be given to how a person travels to and from the stations. This link and cost is an integral part of a so called train journey and often falls foul of anti taxi/car schemes in the centres of cities and towns near stations. It adds to delays and frustrations.

I could have been better off driving by motorway to Cardiff, avoiding the centre and urban area of Cardiff with the station altogether. I went to a venue close to a motorway exit.

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[The Conservative Manifesto and drivers](#)

We are told to expect action to make it more difficult for Councils to introduce low traffic neighbourhoods and 20 mph zones. We are promised the end of the much disliked ULEZ zone in outer London.

There have been big strides to tax and regulate drivers off the roads in Wales and London in recent years, and in other parts of England with anti driver Councils. Getting the right balance between local needs for clean air and safety, and combined local and national needs for a good road system that get people to work and goods to market is not easy. Here are some thoughts of how to get a better balance.

1. National highways should be for road vehicles. They are our safest and fastest roads. The network needs completing to at least 4 lane dual carriageway standard, preferably with grade separated junctions. These are

U.K. government controlled.

2 A strategic network of major local roads. Whilst under the control of local Highways authorities they should have national limits placed on how far they can go in restricting them. Government could lead cross Authority larger improvement schemes. These roads would normally be a minimum of 30 mph in urban areas and faster permitted speeds elsewhere.

3. Other roads under local control. Residential roads should be regulated against excess speed and inappropriate parking.

4. It is a good idea to promote more walking and cycling. This should be done by installing better footpaths, greenways and cycle ways apart from main roads. We need more and safer capacity, not cycleways carved out of an inadequate main road adding to tensions and conflicts between different types of road user.

5. Review extent of pavement capacity in London where it is in places excessive. I walk a lot in London. Along the Embankment and in the City pavement space is well above our needs whilst east-west road capacity has been strangled.

Drivers are being taxed and regulated off the roads by Lib Dem, Green and Labour Councils

In Wokingham a Lib Dem led Borough Council embarked on a £5.5 m waste of money to worsen a crucial roundabout junction of two important B roads in Finchampstead. The junction also gave access to a public car park and retail car parks for local shops and a garage. The aim was to narrow the roads, replace normal pavements with Lib Dem yellow brick ones which quickly discolour and become uneven, and to persuade more people to shop and take children to the local school on foot or by bike.

The long period of works and road closures has slashed shop and garage turnover badly. It has driven vehicles into adjacent residential roads seeking rat runs. The Council has littered the area with road closure and diversion signs and bollards to narrow these routes. I had to travel 5 miles yesterday to complete a one mile journey. The alternative route also included a closure of half that main road with three way lights and four minute waiting time. Locals have been up in arms about the disruption and cost. Lib Dems lost all 3 of the local seats in the village as a result of this crazy scheme in the May election. They tried to blame the previous Council who refused to vote the scheme through, realising what bad value it was and how unpopular it would be. There has been no compensation to the shops and garage

for lost turnover.

Flushed with their success in making the lives of those of us who drive to work, drive to the shops or to drop off children such a misery, the Lib Dems now want to repeat this anti driver policy in other parts of the Borough and send taxpayers the bill. They are about to embark on the battle of the Woollah roundabout. This is one of Wokingham's best junctions. It is crucial to all who live on Woollah as it is the main route in and out of this delightful residential area. Anyone needing to drive to work, to the Wokingham shops and to local schools needs to rely on this usually free flowing roundabout. The Lib Dems want to make that very difficult during prolonged roadworks. They want to reduce the carriageways for vehicles and create traffic jams where none exist. The California Crossroads experience should make them think again, but they are motivated by a wish to hit the drivers.

Interest rates

The Bank of England is independent when it comes to forecasting inflation and the economy. It has the sole right to fix the Base rate, the crucial short term interest rate that affects the returns of savers and the costs of borrowers,

All the time I was an MP I respected their Base rate power and did not advise on changes. I was critical of their forecasts of inflation when they were obviously wrong.

Now I can write and speak as I like about interest rates. The European Central Bank and the US Fed made similar mistakes to the Bank of England delivering inflations several times target level in 2022. The Japanese, Swiss and Chinese Central Banks did not make the same mistakes and their inflation stayed low, showing the inflation was not the result of lockdowns and the Ukraine war.

Over the last year the ECB has followed a better policy to correct past mistakes than the Bank of England. This week they rightly cut interest rates recognising sluggish growth and tight money and credit. The Bank of England should do the same.

The Bank will probably hold rates claiming it should not move them in an election period. That implies it suspends its own independence. The Bank needs to be seen to be independent on rates. Otherwise not cutting them now will be seen as pro Labour and cutting them now seen as pro Conservative . I think most people do believe the Bank is the independent setter of rates and I have not seen any Conservative government pressures on the Bank over rates.

The U.K. economy has been badly slowed by the Bank's very tough money policy

2023-4. Inflation will come down as a result. The Bank should cut, especially given its obstinate refusal to change its very damaging policy of over the top bond sales.