

More trees please

I have always liked trees. I was brought up on the romance of the English forests – the adventure of Robin Hood in Sherwood, the lovers in Shakespeare's Arden, the beauty of local mixed deciduous tree woods, the walks to see primroses or to retrieve a conker from the forest floor. The landscape looks magnificent when the varied greens of the tree canopy in a wood or the mixed leaves in a coppice or hedgerow punctuate the landscape.

So I welcome the conclusion of the recent Report of the Climate Change Committee that urges us to plant more trees. I am glad the government is pressing ahead anyway with an expanded national forest. I trust also it will find ways to stimulate more tree plantations to deliver the wood we need. It makes little sense to import so much wood from Scandinavia, Canada and elsewhere. It seems particularly absurd to claim it is a green idea to burn so much wood at Drax that has come across the Atlantic in fuel burning ships. We need more faster growing timber for basic uses and for energy, and some good quality slower growing hardwoods for furniture and construction. The heart of English architecture and shipbuilding was always English oak. We could grow more and use more English oak for a variety of enduring purposes.

I am all in favour of a greener policy than we follow in many respects. I want us to get rid of VAT on green products like insulation, heating controls and draught excluders as soon as we are allowed to out of the EU. I am a strong advocate of more fuel efficiency and better home insulation. I want us to keep more green spaces and gaps between settlements. In my own part of the world the pace of housebuilding and the erosion of countryside is too fast. I want a future plan that is gentler on the landscape. I want more food production at home to cut food miles. I want a fishing policy that is kinder to our fish and to local fishermen and women.

The Climate Change Report contains some important figures. It reminds us that the UK has done more than most to cut CO₂ output, now down by 44% from 1990 levels. The UK consumes 7 tonnes of carbon a head a year compared to the EU's 9, China's 10 and the USA's 20. If we carry on with current targets the UK will increase the average global temperature according to their models by 0.005 degrees C by 2070. They want us to go further so the increase the UK contributes is just 0.001 degrees C.

I want to concentrate on greening the landscape and reducing migration levels to cut the pressure of development on our countryside.

The message of the local elections

Both main national parties in Parliament lost votes and seats in the Council

elections. The failure to get through Brexit as promised annoyed a lot of voters who wished to vote for anyone other than the two main parties as a result. The Conservatives were blamed for promising an exit with or without an Agreement by 29 March 2019 and then delaying. Leave voters were annoyed we are not out, and firm Remainers worried that nonetheless the party still says it wants to leave. Labour were punished for changing their Manifesto position of 2017 with a view to watering down or delaying Brexit by Leave voters, and by Remain voters for not being clearly in favour of revocation or a second referendum.

The Council elections were not a second referendum on Brexit, as the Brexit party did not stand, and as the switchers away from Labour and Conservative were both Leave and Remain supporters. There was a mood to vote for anyone who was not a candidate for Labour or the Conservatives in quite a few cases. Independents did well, without expressing a particular viewpoint on the EU referendum.

There were various local issues Council by Council, where some incumbent Councils were unpopular for perceived failings on their local decisions. Many of the doorstep conversations I had in the Wokingham and West Berkshire contests were about local issues.

[Message to Councillors in Wokingham Borough](#)

I would like to thank all Councillors who stood for re election but who lost their seats yesterday. I am grateful to you for all the hard work you put into your roles and for your service to the local community.

Many electors wanted change, both national and local. Much of the criticism of the Conservative party was about the failure to resolve the Brexit issue in a timely way. The government was criticised by both Leave and Remain voters for their draft Agreement and for the failure to secure a deal more could accept. Labour too suffered from criticism of its changed stance on Brexit compared to the General election and its role in the current impasse in Parliament.

There were also a number of important local concerns. Many relate to congestion, the disruption of our streets by utility works and the construction of new homes, and to the cumulative impact of substantial development on services and facilities. I am willing to work with the Council to help shape a new Plan for the future based around lower housing targets, and to help the Council resist extra development over current plans. I am also keen for the Council to do more to improve junctions, upgrade our road network, help provide more school places and surgery capacity for the NHS and promote the new Town Centre in Wokingham.

I also congratulate all the new Councillors elected and look forward to working with them in the interests of our shared constituents. There is an important role for an informed opposition to criticise where things can be improved and to support where common cause is in the interests of our community.

[“We don’t believe you”](#)

I am bringing out a new book which looks at why populist parties and Presidential candidates are doing well in many elections. It looks at the big gap between what the establishments do and what the voters want them to do. It points out that the two sides do not just disagree about the remedies, but they now disagree about what are the main problems.

More criticism and disillusion set in with the series of difficult civil and religious wars in the Middle East. Electorates in the USA and the EU were not impressed by the political follow up to the military campaigns, and by the fall out from the bitter wars. It got worse with the banking crash of 2008-9. Governments and Central banks blamed the bankers, but voters thought the governing elite were partly responsible as well. In more recent years the failure to advance real incomes at the pre crisis pace, the attack on personal transport and the wish to control people’s thoughts on a wide range of topics, the alliance between big business and big government, higher taxes and the apparent scorn for democracy have all served to make the fissure greater between traditional political parties and candidates on the one hand, and the governing elites on the other.

The book has chapters on military intervention, austerity economics, Brexit, the collapse of the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats as governing parties in most of the EU, the clash between social media and conventional media, the way some large businesses side with big government to the annoyance of their customers, political correctness, large scale migration and the difficulties caused by the Euro.

“We don’t believe you Why Populists reject the establishment” Bite-sized books Available through Amazon

[Mrs May strengthens Remain forces in](#)

Cabinet

The replacement of Gavin Williamson in Cabinet with Rory Stewart is the net change of yesterday's mini reshuffle. The purpose is clear. Mr Williamson thought we should get on with leaving the EU. Mr Stewart is wedded to Mrs May's deeply unpopular stay in and pay up Agreement. The Agreement delays our exit by around 2 years, maybe 4 years, and probably keeping us in the customs union and much else thereafter.

There was no leak of sensitive national security information. Someone leaked which Cabinet members opposed Mrs May's wish to let a Chinese company into the UK 5G system. This is no worse than the regular leaks from Cabinet that we have got used to. Mr Williamson denies he leaked.

Whatever the truth of this leak it is quite obvious the system is unfair. There has been no leak enquiry when the leaker could have been a Remain supporting Cabinet member. Yesterday was another bad day where the position of those who want to stop us leaving the EU as promised now was strengthened with an additional recruit who shows no sympathy for all those who oppose the Agreement for failing to take back control as the Leave majority wants to.

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