

## The Commons votes

Yesterday the Commons voted down the Grieve and Cooper amendments to the government's neutral motion. The Grieve amendment would have given Parliamentary time for a series of debates and votes on indicative approaches to Brexit, seeking to pre-empt or direct the role of government to propose, amend or pass legislation and pursue policies of its design. The Cooper amendment would have given Parliamentary time to enact a delay in Brexit, amending the EU Withdrawal Act, against the government's wishes. These amendments were rejected by 20 and 23 votes respectively, more than the government's majority.

The Commons also passed the Spelman amendment by 8 votes. This amendment to the motion expresses the opinion that we should not leave without an agreement, but it does not overturn the legislation already passed for us to leave on 29 March. The government opposed it, in part because any suggestion we will not leave without a deal undermines the UK bargaining position.

The Brady amendment also passed requiring the government to go back to Brussels to seek to remove the Irish backstop from the draft Withdrawal Agreement. The government to win over more Conservatives to this measure promised that they will seek a rewrite of the legal text of the agreement on the backstop, when they had previously indicated they would just be seeking a protocol which would have been too weak. The PM also promised she will strengthen the official negotiating team and will take seriously the Malthouse compromise about the future negotiations and possible settlement. As someone who objects to more than just the backstop in the draft Agreement I was unable to support a motion which said I would support the Withdrawal Agreement after changes to the backstop. I do support the part of the Malthouse approach which seeks a managed no deal Brexit with talks about a comprehensive free trade agreement and use of the Article 24 of the GATT whilst in talks about such a proposal. I do not agree with more delay or payments to the EU after March. It is difficult to see what we might be able to agree after March that we have been unable to agree over the previous 33 months. If the EU agreed this removes the need for any tariffs or new barriers to UK/EU trade.

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## New migration policy causes stress for Labour

The New Immigration Bill before the Commons yesterday carries out one of the promises of the government over Brexit. It takes powers to repeal freedom of movement from the EU into the UK, establishing a migration system for EU

countries which will be the same as the system for the rest of the world. This could come into effect shortly after March 29 if we leave then, but would be delayed for a couple of years were the UK to enter into a Withdrawal Agreement and so called Transition.

The government has not provided many of the details about how the powers will be used. It has stated that it wants to base its common worldwide migration policy on allowing the recruitment of talent from anywhere around the globe. It is likely talent will be defined by a minimum salary or wage for a job the person is coming to accept, but clearly it could be qualification based as well or additionally. Students will be allowed then as now to come to recognised UK institutions to study an approved course, and faculty members allowed to reflect the international nature of much modern scholarship.

Labour decided they could not oppose this measure. After all they had promised to end freedom of movement, and seemed to understand the views of many of their voters on this issue. Some in the Union movement did feel that allowing too many people into low -aid jobs from abroad undercut British workers and tended to help keep pay down. Late in the day Labour under pressure on social media and from some of its own backbench MPs decided to switch course and ask them to vote against it. Apparently Labour changed its mind and felt that the policy would be too restrictive on migration after all.

What criteria would you want the government to use when deciding who can gain entry to work here? This legislation takes back control, but leaves many questions unanswered about how exactly we should use the new powers we gain once we have left the EU.

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## Better healthcare

I am taking an interest in how the extra money for the NHS will be spent. It is most important that NHS England comes up with a proper plan of what they are trying to achieve by way of expansion and service improvements, so they can then test out how many extra staff they may need and what new contracts they should sign to deliver the better healthcare.

I understand that the Health Secretary is engaged on just such an exercise. I would be interested to hear from people, especially constituents, on what would be sensible requests for spending this additional cash. My priorities include wanting a well staffed GP service locally so that patients can get appointments that are timely and GPs feel they have manageable workloads so they can provide the best possible service. I think we do need some more hospital capacity for the most common procedures to reduce waiting times and provide some choice and flexibility for patients over when and where they receive treatment.

Local services need to be expanded to reflect the additional homes and increase in population. I share the government's wish to see better mental health provision where there are proven protocols and treatments that can make a difference to people in need of help.

The government is considering the role of technology in future medical services and care. How far do patients want to go with digital booking, or even remote consultations? I am keen that this should be based on patient preference rather than a mandatory conversion, as healthcare is a private and individual matter where if the patient needs to feel happy with the system and trust the doctor for it stand most chance of working.

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## [The Brady amendment does not allow Brexit](#)

The Brady amendment says MPs should vote for the Withdrawal Agreement if the backstop is amended or withdrawn. It is vague over how to fix the backstop and fails to mention the other many failings of the Withdrawal Agreement. I will not be supporting it. The Conservative Manifesto made clear that the government needed to keep negotiation over the Withdrawal Agreement in line with negotiation of the future partnership to have any bargaining power. The Withdrawal Agreement would lock us in for 21 to 45 more months of talks, placing us back under EU laws and taxes for that period, with no guarantee of a good exit.

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## [Possible development sites in Wokingham Borough](#)

In the long run up to the next local plan for Wokingham various landowners and developers will try to promote certain areas where they have an interest as future development sites. The Council has the job of identifying sites that are compatible with their environmental, transport, planning and public service policies, and including the appropriate ones in the draft local plan. This draft document will then be subject to consultation and assessment before it can become a finalised local plan.

I understand the wish of some in the local community to set out opposition to particular sites being pushed by landowners or builders at an early stage in the process. The best thing to do is to write in with objections to the use

of such sites to the Council planning department or to the local Councillors in the affected ward, so these can be taken into account during the early process of sifting possible sites for inclusion. Any site for housebuilding needs to take into account a range of factors including the impact on local road network, access to public transport, impact on land drainage, danger of erosion of green gaps between settlements or areas of special landscape interest or good quality farmland, strains placed on local health and education services and general environmental impact.