

Visit to Evendons Primary School

On Friday 5th November I visited Evendons Primary School and gave a short talk on the role of an MP. The children asked a wide range of questions about Parliament and the role of an MP. They were particularly interested in environmental matters which I wrote about on my website the following day. I thank the Head for inviting me and for showing me the school, and wish the pupils well in their studies.

NHS spending and capacity

The NHS needs more capacity to get the waiting lists down. During the pandemic the NHS did provide many more beds in the Nightingale units in case the pandemic caseloads became too great. They resisted advice to use these facilities for all covid work to keep the General hospitals infection free and able to carry on with their regular work. As a result we have a big backlog.

Large additional sums of money have been made available to the NHS to handle the one off costs of tackling the pandemic, and to deal with the waiting lists. In order to cut waiting lists we may well need more beds in the NHS. It has been one of the features of the NHS that managers have always chosen to operate with relatively few beds compared to the workload and have said they aim to make very productive use of these beds. It leads to issues over so called bed blockers, and how easy it is to send patients on to care in the community or recuperation in other NHS institutions beyond the District General hospital.

It should surely be relatively easy to provide more beds. Some of the beds and equipment acquired for the Nightingales might be available to get us started. The NHS could also set up specialist units in different properties to undertake procedures like cataract removal or other simpler surgery away from the DG hospital.

Apparently the new issue is the numbers of staff this will need. Of course just adding beds is no use without enough nurses and doctors to administer to the extra patients. I understand that the NHS has many jobs open for applicants currently, with many more posts allowed for in the budget than the NHS has staff. The NHS needs to see what it can do to encourage qualified people to return to its employment and what can be done to promote more people through education and training. The NHS should also consider the balance of work between highly qualified doctors and nurses and other staff to see if more assistance can be safely given to the medically trained to provide great service to more patients.

Levelling up

The government is we are told working up an agenda to show how levelling up will take place. Under Secretary Gove all the main departments are being harnessed to the task.

They should begin with the Treasury. The anti enterprise policies of IR35, higher National Insurance and higher corporation tax have to change. The temporary super deduction from Corporation Tax for investment is not sufficient given the longer term big hike in rate. The treasury should take Corporation tax down to 15% and cut taxes for the self employed and small business.

Mr Gove's own department should come up with a planning policy which encourages more house building in parts of the countries with cheaper land and a shortage of new homes to buy. Now many more people are home working for at least part of the week there is less need to overbuild close to London.

The Business department should take more positive steps to encourage import substitution and more made in the U.K. It should revitalise domestic oil and gas to displace imports, and put in more reliable electricity capacity. An industrial revival needs more affordable and reliable energy.

The Environment department needs to reboot its subsidies and regulations to foster more home food production, in place of its current model of wilding the U.K. and importing food.

I will look in another blog at training and education, to help more people on a personal journey to job and business success.

Carbon counting has its limits

Yesterday I drew attention to some of the many areas where carbon counting is the main driver of U.K. policy. As a few of you point out, it does not seem to drive the one policy where some of you want it most. One of the most obvious ways to cut the UK's carbon footprint would be to cut inward migration. Every additional person clearly adds substantially to CO₂ output as a direct result of their personal output and all the output needed to supply them with food, heating and transport. Indeed additional people are in the first years more carbon intensive as we need to build additional homes, surgeries, schools and utility capacity to accommodate them. Their very way of transport to get here is also carbon intensive.

The anger of people about the migration is increased when they hear leaders tell us the U.K. must do more to control CO₂. The more people we invite in the more we need to throttle back to compensate for the extra CO₂ from an expanding population. The Home Secretary says she intend to close down the people smuggling and trafficking. So when? When will the new legislation go through? How will she make it less attractive for people to come here illegally? When will border enforcement crack these smuggling rings and arrest the boat owners and people runners?

The place of carbon counting in policy making

The UK has been the most successful larger country at cutting its carbon dioxide output since 1990. Some of this was a gain for our economy and society as well as a win for the world, where new investment substituted more efficient fuel saving ways of making and growing things or generating power. Some of it was not a gain for us or the world where it entailed ceasing doing something at home and importing from somewhere else, often in ways which increased the amount of carbon dioxide produced in making and transporting them.

The world system for counting and managing carbon dioxide output is understandably based around the national production of carbon dioxide. As the policies to cut the output of CO₂ are decided and implemented by national governments (or the EU) and companies acting under national laws, that makes sense as a means of management. It does not, however, make global sense if countries decide to cease making or growing things that produce a lot of CO₂ in order to import them and shift the CO₂ onto another country's budget. It is positively harmful both to the country ceasing production and to the wider world if as a result the addition of CO₂ from long distance transport and or from more carbon intensive ways of production in the exporting country actually increases the total world output of CO₂.

In the UK it appears that many officials and some Ministers regard national decarbonisation as the main or only imperative in thinking through policies. In the energy department there has been a mad dash to close down coal power stations, to block new gas combined cycle stations and greatly increase reliance on imported electricity through interconnectors. If we end up importing power which comes from Russian gas or German coal that is not a win. The same department has been keen to plan the run down of existing gas and oil fields in the North Sea and to prevent new connections to untapped reserves that are discovered. Instead they prefer we rely on increasing volumes of imported oil and gas during the "transition". The agriculture department seems worried by methane from cows for milk and beef cattle, so it offers grants to wild our land and to make us ever more dependent on

imported meat and dairy products. It allows us to mainly import salads, flowers and other items needing greenhouse heating from the Netherlands instead of helping the UK create more jobs and cut the food miles with more home production. The Business Department watches as the UK retreats from aluminium, steel, ceramics and other energy intensive manufactures, only to rely more on imports.

In each case departments need to give greater weightings to the need for more better paid jobs and more successful businesses in the UK, and the need to increase national resilience at a time of disrupted world trade and global shortages. They need to also see that even given their main preoccupation, CO2 output, there is a case for doing more at home to cut the food miles and to improve the fuel efficiency of processes in industry.