

The Business Department needs to promote UK energy to promote UK industry

I attach below my proposal to the Business Secretary:

Levelling up requires the UK to attract and retain more investment in industry as well as services. One of the main requirements to keep and attract industry is a plentiful supply of affordable energy. This may well in the future be renewable electricity or hydrogen gas made using renewable electricity, but for the next few years industry remains heavily dependent on gas.

This means we either allow more UK gas to be produced and supplied on longer term contract at affordable prices, or watch as more of our industry is closed down and replaced with imports from countries that do have cheaper gas. If you want to make glass, ceramics, paper, steel, cement, plastics or many other products you need gas. Importing it from somewhere else does not reduce the carbon footprint. It usually increases it.

The UK energy policy in recent years has been to close down our coal power stations, to avoid building much new gas generating capacity and to rely more and more on imports. We need Norwegian, Qatari and EU gas in increasing quantities to keep our plants open. When there is a worldwide gas shortage our partial dependence on imported gas at world spot prices causes particular stress. We need increasing amounts of EU and Norwegian electricity.

We compound the difficulties of the steel industry by failing to mine a specialist coal we have in the U.K. and need for steel output. The chemical industry of course relies on oil and gas feedstock for much of what it does, but we have not allowed sufficient production and a close working relationship between the energy industry at home and the chemical industry. Germany has a larger chemical industry without a home gas and oil industry which should have placed it at a disadvantage but Germany does cut energy prices for industry and relies on a lot more coal in the total mix.

Shouldn't we trust the market more and grant the permits for UK exploration and development of domestic oil and gas? Wouldn't that reduce CO2 by cutting dependence on imports from coal based systems like Germany and China and from the extra transport it takes to bring the goods to us?

Newsnight

Some of you say you want to know about media engagements. This morning BBC Newsnight invited me on for tonight. They wanted to know if I was happy to talk about energy or the Northern Ireland Protocol and I said Yes, either or both. Chasing them this afternoon for the details they then said they had changed their mind and cancelled it. No idea why, as I would imagine they would have to follow at least one of those stories.

Visit to Floreat Montague Primary School on 24 September 2021



I visited Floreat Montague on Friday 24 September. I met and talked to a number of pupils, and was hosted by the Chairman of the Board John Hutt and the Headteacher, Patrick Pritchett. Councillor Gregor Murray from the local ward who is also a parent joined the visit.

There was an initial discussion about raising standards and the ethos of the school. I praised the use of synthetic phonics as the best way of encouraging good reading and writing at an early age. I also discussed the way project work around stated themes or tasks can be used to allow pupils in a class of varied abilities to participate fully and achieve good outcomes. I was pleased to see the school's emphasis on kindness and engaging with all pupils.

During the tour of the school a couple of boys were energetic in their enthusiasm for football, and most engaging over opportunities for them to play and to follow Premier League teams. There was a Question and answer

session with four of the older pupils selected for the task of interviewing me . I asked them to comment on what they most liked about their school, on what improvement they would like to see and which lessons or activities engaged them the most. The pupils asked about electric cars, charger points, plastic waste in the oceans, sustainability and cycleways. I explained government policy and my own thoughts in line with the views set out on this website.

I was grateful for the welcome to Floreat Montague, and pleased to talk to pupils about their lives in the school and about their interest in issues affecting the local community and the wider world. I wish the school every success as it expands, completes its exciting history mural project and enriches the lives of all pupils who pass through.

If gas is dear you need more of it or a better alternative

The Business Secretary was the Energy Minister, and is now the boss of the Energy Minister. His disagreements with the Treasury over whether he can offer any subsidy to hard pressed manufacturers need not prevent him helping the energy using industries very directly. He should invite them in with the gas supply industry and the UK gas producers and discuss how going forward the UK can produce more domestic gas to reduce our reliance on erratic and currently very expensive imported energy.

An industrial user of gas that needs plenty at a competitive price to make steel or glass or paper or ceramics wants some reassurance that going forward they can obtain enough gas at sensible prices to be able to keep their customers. If the government allowed the UK gas industry to find, produce and deliver more of the gas that is available in our islands and seas they could offer more long term contract gas to domestic industry on sensible terms.

The Minister could explain to the green lobby that this is a greener answer as well. It makes little sense to bring gas compressed by use of energy around the world in large tankers needing a lot of diesel to power them to our shores, when local gas could pass down a pipe for a fraction of the power needed for the import. If something is too dear you either need more of it or a substitute. There may be other ways of making steel and paper in due course, but for the time being if we want to save our industries they need cheaper gas.

James Bond and today's UK

I was gripped by the latest James Bond movie through its action packed twists of plot.

The film is a statement to the world that UK derived brands and cultural icons can fill cinema seats and entertain millions in many different cultures and countries. I wish it commercial success as it helps the traditional cinema revive after lockdown.

What kind of image of the UK does it project? Whilst viewers would be wise to see it as drama not documentary and will appreciate many of the unrealistic conventions of the 007 genre, there will be those who take away a message about the UK from it.

I was surprised to be warned that the film contained moderate violence. There didn't seem to be anything moderate about a series of mass murders, mass sanctioned deaths of arms carrying criminals, the use of explosives to enter and control populated buildings and missile strikes on an inhabited island. The story centred as before around the actions of the UK secret services on the world stage. The Head of the service was happy to authorise killings anywhere in the world in pursuit of dangerous global criminals. There was no reference to the National Security Council and only once was it thought a good idea to mention to the PM some of what they were doing. So it was clearly not a representation of the legal process, rule of law and democratic controls that apply.

Leaving aside the unrealistic idea that officials in the UK can authorise machine gun fights and dangerous car pursuits leading to the death of drivers in overseas countries, the film gave a very positive view of the UK in three crucial respects. The senior officials were very loyal to our country. Our country stands for right and the defeat of evil worldwide criminal gangs throughout the movie. The officials could summon up precise force, equipment and clever innovations to win any war against a criminal gang however violent and resourceful they might be. Whether it was in Scandinavia or near Japan, people could be quickly deployed. What's not to like, unless you are a criminal.

Just as the film overdid the lack of legal restraints on UK counter action, so I fear it flattered government in its portrait of speed, resource and innovation. Let us hope our senior officials study the brave and inventive officials we see in the drama to see how we can increase our success in the struggle against violent serious global criminals within the rule of law.

In many ways the cars were the stars. Aston Martin emerged victorious, though its vintage vehicles got lead roles and its latest machine a bit part. Range Rover was present in force. Shrewd product placement should help some UK brands in a competitive luxury market. One of our naval Destroyers also appeared in action, reminding the world that the navy gives us the capability to intervene anywhere where there is a sea to sail.