

Housing need and numbers

The tensions between those who need a home of their own backed by the house builders and developers and those who worry about the pressures on local schools, surgeries, hospitals and green spaces have become acute in the last two decades. The yearly arrival of more than 250,000 additional people needing homes compared with the 50,000 a year in the 1980s has required a big increase in building. There is also the demand from people already settled here as children seek a home of their own and divorced people who need a home each. This is partly offset by elderly people vacating homes if they need to go into a care home or die, and by some single people choosing to share a home with a partner.

Today there is a new tension over the decision on CV 19 health policy grounds to house illegal migrants in hotels rather than other housing, with many writing to MPs criticising the costs and the diversion of hotels from more traditional uses.

The position could be improved if the authorities had more success in preventing illegal migration. Most of us condemn people trafficking. Ministers want the profiteers arrested and taken out of circulation. Their businesses should be stopped. When will more success be announced?

It is also right to choke off most businesses being able to import cheap cut price Labour all the time there is a domestic option. In some cases shortages will need better pay and conditions and training programmes to meet our own demand.

I will be asking more questions about the development of the governments approach to skills, domestic recruitment of Labour and illegal migrants.

Filling the gap in our energy needs

I have recently asked some questions about the amount of energy we import and about the capacity we have available to generate electricity.

The government said their capacity auctions have “secured the majority of GB’s needs to meet the forecast peak demand out to 2024/5 at a low cost”. It is true it says the majority. Does that mean the minority can be covered but at less satisfactory prices, or does it mean there is still a theoretical gap? If the latter they need to auction some more requirements.

When I asked if they would keep the remaining coal stations available which had to be used recently when we had a windless period, I was told they do not plan to do so as they use the capacity auction system. I fully accept that

capacity auctions can be the best way of procuring the cheapest next available power, and these are indifferent as to ways of generating. The point about asking is that they have just had to use the coal stations, so putting a ball and chain through them might not be a great idea. If there are cheaper and better ways of guaranteeing sufficient capacity then of course the coal stations could be demolished but only after better sources of reliable power have been secured.

I went on to ask if they were thinking of converting the coal stations they have just had to use to biomass, as they have done with the bulk of the capacity at Drax. They ruled that out in their response.

When I asked about substituting more UK produced gas for some of the expensive gas we are importing, including long distance LNG, I was told that they offered but “conditional support for ongoing domestic gas production”. I still do not understand why they think imported gas is better in any circumstances. Long distance gas brought in on ships must be less green given the transport involved and probably dearer.

It appears that gaining a low domestic carbon dioxide score is the main driver of policy. Policy needs to ensure sufficient UK energy capacity at affordable prices as well. Importing timber pellets or gas is not a carbon win on any sensible accounting scheme.

Tackling health waiting lists

We are all in favour of getting NHS waiting lists down. Patients need timely appointments and prompt treatments. The government has announced a substantial unspecified portion of the £36bn extra in one announcement over three years to tackle waiting lists, money to be shared and transferred eventually to social care. It has announced another £8bn added to future budgets. I asked some questions about how this money is going to be spent.

When I asked how many extra medical staff will be recruited using the £ 8bn I was told “We are working closely with NHS England and NHS Improvement to develop a plan for how that funding will be used including workforce requirements and additional medical posts that may be needed”.

When I asked where was the plan to reduce waiting lists I was told they aim to publish “an elective recovery delivery plan ” in November. They have explained that they added £1bn to this year’s £1bn Elective Recovery fund and aim to spend the £8bn over the three years 2022/3 to 2024/5. When I asked about the NI surcharge money they said they are “working with NHS England and NHS Improvement to develop a plan of how that funding will be used”

When I asked how much the property costs would be of setting up new NHS diagnostic centres they told me the small and precise figure of £55m. That

implies a plan with proper costings for that venture. I look forward to seeing how many centres that buys. The bigger cost will of course be staffing them. When I asked about the value for money of the Test and Trace programme I was told there will be a value for money report on that in the late autumn this year.

I was somewhat surprised by these answers. Given the strength and depth of NHS management I thought they would have put together a plan to bid for funds from the Treasury for the waiting list work. I would have expected the workforce requirements to be the main feature and cost in the plan. I would have expected the Treasury to require detail over how waiting lists were to be brought down before placing a firm sum into the budget. I would also have expected the Treasury to have pushed back on the huge Test and Trace budget to see if some of this year's allocation could be transferred to waiting list work. There are other elements in the large and fast growing health budget of the last two years that also need examining, as they should have been one off and set up costs brought on by the pandemic. There is a general attempt in the Red Book to distinguish between one off and regular spending.

Presumably the costs of establishing then standing down the Nightingales was a one off . Presumably necessary work on better controls over airflows and air cleaning to curb infection spread has all been done by now, and those items should drop out of budgets. Presumably fewer of the workforce are now having to self isolate or be off sick as the Covid case rate in hospital declines and as serious infections wane thanks to widespread vaccination. All that should help improve the ability of the hospitals to tackle backlogs and to get staff back to more normal duties and routines. I will watch out for the plan to get the lists down, and will ask further questions to see how they are getting on. They were not able to tell me how many Chief Executives the various parts of the English NHS now employs. I would have thought someone would keep a record of that, as they all get paid.

COP 26 is undermined by China, Russia and other large CO2 producers.

It looks as if whatever agreements can be secured in the next few days over cars and cash, trees and coal, the world will definitely see more carbon dioxide produced at the end of this decade than this year. The G20 partners were unwilling to deliver the full \$100 bn a year for the lower income countries, and some members were unwilling to curb their own emissions anytime soon.

In the agreements to be made about some of the areas where CO2 could be reduced the UK must not get itself into a position where it promises too

much only to end up importing the goods we need from countries that produce more CO₂ making them and supplying them than we would for ourselves. Importing goods from China or energy from the EU does not cut the world's total carbon footprint but does weaken our economy and reduces our job availability. We will still be burning gas this decade so we should burn more of our own to cut the carbon cost and cash cost of all those LNG tankers coming in from miles round the world.

Attention needs to shift to China, producing 27% of the world's CO₂ and planning to go on increasing it this decade. It needs to turn to Germany, still using plenty of coal and arguing over whether to do so until 2038. It needs to ask Mr Biden how much of his green investment programme has survived his bruising encounters with his own Democrat Senators, who seem to have halved the total spending package the President thought necessary, which included the major change towards green investment. Is President Biden about to preside over the rapid run down of the US coal, oil and gas industries which grew strongly under his predecessor and alarmed green campaigners? Probably not. If he did the USA would have to import more.

Attention also needs to be given to helping the private sector launch an array of compelling products and services that consumers can afford. The green revolution needs to discover the Mini of the new vehicles, the iPad of the new heating systems and the smartphone of the new diets that will walk off the shelves because people like them more and can afford them.

The leading foreign visitors at COP 26 need to avoid looking cut off from the real world the rest of us live in. It is no good them lecturing each other, all using the same alarmist sound bites if they plan to stick with their cavalCADES and private jets flitting from air conditioned hotel to meat rich banquets. It looks odd to be telling the world's millions to sacrifice their current lifestyles and aspirations and to abandon their cars, holiday flights, gas, boilers and diets when the COP elite think their demands do not apply to themselves or can be brushed aside by buying pardons.

Some policies which would cut human CO₂ output

The experts assembled for COP 26 claim that the world's average temperature is rising and that the cause is the output of too much CO₂ and methane by mankind.

This being so, shouldn't they require all anti Climate change conferences to be digital events? It is quite obvious that Glasgow is producing a surge in emissions from travel, banquets and air conditioned hotel use. A cavalcade of 85 vehicles to bring the US President does not offer a good look for all those telling the rest of us to walk or cycle.

The debate should begin by looking at population growth. As a freedom loving democrat I do not recommend population control policies. However many countries do express views on population numbers and family policy. China, the world's most populous country for many years did have a one child policy. Most countries do have family policies based around taxes, benefits, child care and education policies. Does COP 26 have something useful to say about how many people the world can sustain and what is a sensible balance between helping families without providing financial incentives for larger families?

For any given country policy should take account of the needs of wildlife and nature. Too many people can mean the removal of habitats from wildlife, and the loss of species. The best green policy the U.K. could adopt is to return net migration levels to those of the 1990s before Labour opened our borders. At current rates we need to build a city the size of Plymouth every year to accommodate new arrivals. This generates a lot of extra CO₂ for the construction. It erodes our countryside. It requires expansion of public services.

The governments assembled could all pledge to green their own activities, switching all public buildings to electrical power and removing diesel and petrol cars to show the rest of us how to do it. If they pioneered maybe they could get the costs down making it more attractive and feasible for others. Saving energy is a good idea and requires millions of sensible daily decisions. Before the pandemic I went to a big government meeting on green matters. The sun was shining strongly through the windows of a huge government room, where all the many bulbs in the chandeliers were alight. I was the only one who asked if we could turn them off.