

The flexibility of the car

The car often gets a bad press. It is briefed against for not being green enough. The bad side effects brought on by accidents are not welcome, but all transport brings it with it deaths and injuries when things go wrong. Motorcycles and cycles bring risks, and there have been tragic public transport crashes.

The Covid 19 disaster has reminded us of the strengths of the car. You can travel in it without breathing over fellow passengers on a bus or train and without exposing yourself to infections from others. You can start near to your home and end near to your work or shop or other destination . The road network still offers considerable scope to get to where you want to go though it could be improved to cut accidents and ease flows through junctions.

The car offers individuals and families considerable travel freedom. It allows us to do a weekly shop and get the heavy goods home easily. It allows us to get to work and back, and to visit family and friends. Currently it allows us to reduce or remove our use of public transport as suggested by the guidance.

I am all in favour of experiment with different fuels, better exhausts, or higher safety standards. Each recent model generation of cars has improved safety features, better fuel efficiency and lower harmful exhaust waste. The important thing is to do this whilst keeping the popular characteristics of the car, the ability to go most places with a decent range.

My car always waits for me and will go as soon as I want to go. That is an important flexibility. true green policies need us to avoid so much congestion through bad road design and insufficient parking.

How should Parliament work?

Normally in these blogs I highlight areas where things have gone wrong or need improving. Today's blog begins with thanks to the Speaker and his staff for something that went right. He got a virtual Parliament up and running smoothly and quickly when some of us thought Parliament needed to be working. It was a time of big decisions on the extent of the lock down and management of the NHS response to the virus.

The virtual Parliament allowed MPs to ask questions and make speeches from home via the Zoom link, and reminded Ministers that their blizzard of decisions needed to be reported to MPs and subjected to questions and suggestions. There were remote divisions where an MP voted by computer once through the on line security. It was a big step forward and answered the

question of how could Parliament function whilst observing social distancing?

It did however have some limitations. No MP was allowed to intervene on a Minister or other speaker, preventing challenge and proper debate. There were no easy informal exchanges between MPs as a debate or the government's business evolved. Everything had to be planned and timetabled in advance, so there could be no spontaneity.

The Leader of the House was keen that something more like the Commons was restored. Again the Speaker and his team responded well, giving us the Mark 2 Covid Commons. Now we have regained the right to intervene. Most MPs need to attend the Commons to speak and vote, and so there is more scope for suitably socially distanced conversations with other MPs as needed. Voting in the lobbies has been restored with orderly and segregated progress to and through the lobby to vote, speeded a bit by the presence of card readers to accept your vote.

The issue is how can it evolve further? There could still usefully be more spontaneity were some speaking slots to be available unallocated in advance, and if some questions were not previously allocated. The chamber with only 50 people in it at any one time does not have the atmosphere it normally has, with most debates heard in silence. Outside the chamber the social distancing advice does not always remain observed, as MPs want to talk to each other. Democratic politics is about the numbers that support a cause as much as it is about the justness of the cause. Daily life at Westminster is about running causes, building support and arguing for change.

[UK Swiss trade agreement](#)

The U.K. and Switzerland have signed a document to complete a financial services Agreement to make trade easier on our exit from EU controls. The U.K. is the largest net exporter of financial services and Switzerland the third in the world.

[July 4th – is this freedom day?](#)

Today there will be restaurants, cafes and pubs open. More life will return to town centres and village streets after the long hibernation.

Some businesses are very positive. They have worked hard to come up with compliant models for doing business, and are hopeful customers will return. They desperately need support so some cash flows through the tills to start

paying some of the bills.

Others are worried. Some still are banned from opening at all. Some have permission but do not see how they can make their model work , given limitations of space in their premises and the demands of social distancing.

Today I would be interested to know the reactions of my readers to this partial relaxation. Will you hit the town to buy a coffee or have lunch out? Do you want to visit the pub? Will you eat or drink in doors, or opt for the garden choice if the weather allows?

The government is worried in case too many people rush to the centres and fail to keep some distance between them. The businesses are worried in case a cautious public stays away in large numbers, leaving the hospitality businesses with all the costs of their new set up and not enough revenue to justify it. It is your town or village centre we are talking about. Those who want to save them have to use them. Governments cannot subsidise them indefinitely to serve too few people.

[Back to school](#)

Yesterday the government set out its wish for the schools to return to educating all eligible children from September.

This is a vital task. Children need the benefit of life in the classroom and in groups for break times. Well taught lessons and the competitive edge of others around them can lift their learning. Whilst many parents have done a good job with home teaching and supervision their children have still missed the stimulus of their friends and classmates. Teachers know the curriculum and how to prepare students for public exams.

It is also the case that some children get more help at home than others which can increase inequalities and unfairness. Parents too will benefit as many need to concentrate more on home working for their jobs, or need to go to work rather than child minding.

The new rules end the idea of social distancing between all in a class or bubble, but keep the different groups apart. We're CV 19 to enter the school the aim would be to isolate the children in the affected bubble and keep the rest of the school open , unless testing suggested it had already spread further.

Some schools have done a good job with Remote learning. Progress should be made with getting all up to standard as it can be a useful adjunct or stand by to classroom face to face work.