

Conservative members in Wokingham and the leadership

I met around 50 members of the Wokingham Conservatives yesterday evening at a drinks reception. Much of the talk was about the leadership. There was no clear message about which candidates were most favoured, with plenty of questions about the past actions, current positions and likely abilities of those in the news.

It also gave me an opportunity to thank all those who had helped in the local elections, and to discuss with Councillors the immediate priorities for the two Councils.

A greener UK

One of the best strands of conservatism is the urge to protect and conserve the flora and fauna in our landscape, to preserve the best of our built inheritance and to undertake new development in a way that is sympathetic to what has gone before and to the natural contours of our world.

This is not to say we want a fossil country. Sometimes the best way to conserve and keep an old building is to allow adaptation and renovation for a new purpose. Sometimes we need to build on green fields as well as on regeneration sites. Some modern buildings are fabulous and add to our traditions. Some changes to the way we farm or garden can enhance the natural world around us. Some old buildings are best recorded for history then demolished for a better replacement.

In recent years large scale migration has meant a much faster new build rate, which has upset some local communities and given rise to a wish to adjust the pace of change. It is difficult to follow a convincing green policy if we expand the population too rapidly and have to build on too many fields or fell too many woods. If we want to limit the national carbon dioxide output we need to limit the number of people we invite in.

There are good economic and social arguments for allowing reasonable numbers of new people to come and settle with us. We may need their skill or they may be family members to people already living here who would like to be reunited with their kith and kin. We will want to take our share of people fleeing war and terror. In the last century we typically invited in around 50,000 additional people every year. This century it has been five times that amount, which has been far too rapid.

I welcome initiatives to use less energy to cut our bills through insulation,

modern controls and more fuel efficient systems. I like the idea that we will clean up our landscape and our seas by being better at limiting the use of plastic and ensuring it is properly handled once it is waste. I am all in favour of recycling and of passing on and re using products that an individual no longer needs or likes. I have found limiting food miles works well, with little need for imported temperate foods in my meal planning. There is good UK food available, and more can be grown if more people want to buy it. I continue to encourage more tree planting as we green our landscape.

[The leadership election](#)



<https://johnredwoodsdiary.com/>

I am all in favour of choice, but a possible offering of 17 candidates or more for Prime Minister creates a muddled field with too many candidates offering a very similar package. The endless launches of new campaigns also takes attention away from those who claim to be front runners, making their task more difficult to be front runners. The MP electorate is proving hard to persuade, showing that the candidates need to come up with better answers to my two fundamental questions for any wannabe leader. How do you get us out cleanly and promptly from the EU, and what is your programme for taking advantage of Brexit with a range of new policies to promote greater prosperity, wider ownership and better public services?

I will not write about all of them, and suspect some of the 17 will decide on reflection not to put in Nomination papers. I have written about two of the four front runners so far. According to Conservative Home Jeremy Hunt leads with a possible 29 MPs in support, Michael Gove and Boris Johnson are joint second with 26 MPs each and Dominic Raab is fourth on 22 MPs. To get into the last two for election by members the top two have got to get around 155 MPs each if the vote is split evenly, or less if one is much more popular than the other amongst MPs. The second placed is likely to have at least a third of the party in support. Today I will say something about Boris Johnson and soon I will also say something about Dominic Raab. Thereafter I will be guided by who seems to be an interesting candidate because of their platform, or because someone is picking up more support.

The MP electorate needs to believe that the winner can deliver Brexit and can rebuild the Conservative vote. Too many candidates are defining the problem

as trying to find compromises a Remain Parliament can accept, which Mrs May failed to achieve. They should instead be telling us how they are going to persuade by their actions the big Leave vote that they can and will achieve Brexit. If they cannot do that they will not rebuild the Conservative position.

Boris Johnson is the most popular candidate with the members so far, with many members of the party wishing him to be on their ballot paper. There is a widespread feeling that the court case against him for the Bus figures is an attack on democracy and an unfair diversion. Many like the way he gave voice to Brexit in the referendum and respect him for resigning from the May government when she decided to back the Chequers plan which most Leavers see as a needless delay and dilution of Brexit. He has reach and appeal to the wider electorate as his Mayoral wins showed that other Conservatives might struggle to achieve. In view of this I asked Boris to send me his statement of why we should vote for him as he had been talking to me about the leadership. His office sent me the following:

“Our next Prime Minister must be someone who can deliver Brexit, unite our Party and, crucially, defeat Labour. Jeremy Corbyn is the single greatest threat to the prosperity of our country and Boris is the man to beat him.

Polls of the public and of labour members repeatedly underline this point and his track record of winning, whether as London mayor or in the referendum, speaks for itself. Added to a positive vision for brexit and the energy and enthusiasm which he has to take forward our economy it is clear he is the right man for the job.”

What do you think of this prospectus?

In order to get more MP support he does have to flesh out how he will get us out of the EU cleanly and quickly, and what new directions he would want for the UK once out. He also needs to deal with his critics about his past alleged gaffes and changes of view.

[A greener Wokingham](#)

I am asking the new Council leadership to consider how we can have a greener Wokingham.

I am suggesting the Council does more to cut its own energy needs by using more low energy lighting, raising standards of insulation in public buildings. improving heating controls, and studying building use to reduce the need to heat and light all parts of a building when use is more restricted.

I am also keen to see the Council identify and protect more open space at a time of considerable pressure for more development. We need to ensure

sufficient landscape is preserved for farming, as green gaps between settlements, as water meadow to assist with flood management , and as space for parks and for gardens.

Leadership candidates who say they will renegotiate the Withdrawal Agreement need to tell us why they think the EU will want to

Several leadership hopefuls seem to think their mere presence in Brussels after becoming PM would get the EU to change its often stated position that there can be no change to the Withdrawal Treaty. It is difficult to understand why they think this. The EU has repeatedly said they will not reopen the Treaty. The EU did nothing to help Mrs May get it through the Commons when she was their best hope of doing so.

The new Commission may not be formed before the summer break. There is no indication that any candidate for Commission President wants to change the policy on the Withdrawal Treaty. It is very unlikely that a new Commission, if one is formed by September, will want to devote the first month of its life locked in major negotiations with a country leaving the Union. They have many important issues they need to handle for the member states staying in. They will want to reinforce those MEPs who believe in the project, not help those trying to leave.

Let us examine today, for example, the prospectus of Jeremy Hunt. I thought he did a generally good job as Health Secretary. I liked the way he believed in the offer of free health care in relation to need. He worked hard to ensure higher quality care with better outcomes was the driving force in management. His record as Foreign Secretary has been more mixed. I find it odd that he has changed his position on Brexit, moving from saying No deal is an acceptable fall back position to now saying a No Deal Brexit is political suicide. He does not seem to have understood what Brexit voters were voting for last week, nor understood that the Conservative party can only rebuild its position with electors if it recaptures many of those Brexit voters who used to vote Conservative. I do not see how he would do that if he wants to block a No Deal Brexit. Nor do I see how he thinks he could get a better deal if he has taken No Deal off the table. The promise of just leaving was always the best way to secure a decent set of agreements on departure. It was a tragedy that Mrs May would not do this. Mr Hunt seems to be continuity May. I note that he only posted two items in his local constituency blog last year and one this year, and just one local issue in 2018 and in 2019 so far on his website.

Have I missed something about his candidature that makes him worthy of being PM?