

## Planning for Wokingham

Today I am meeting the Secretary of State for Communities and local government in the Commons to put Wokingham's case for a slower rate of building. Last year the housebuilding rate shot up to more than twice the required amount under the local plan, with obvious strains on our road network and local communities living nearby.

I have two proposals to put to him. The first is Wokingham's large contribution to the national housebuilding effort should be reflected in decisions by Planning Inspectors,. They should not grant more permissions outside the agreed areas in the local plan.

The second is that Wokingham should have a lower build rate for the next local plan period.

---

## Maybe you cannot keep asking the same question in Parliament

The Speaker's ruling was a good one on the government's Withdrawal Agreement. It has twice been decisively rejected. On the second occasion the government tabled additional documents and argued it was a amended proposal, but many in Parliament thought the changes did not amount to much. As I wrote at the time, ask the same question and you probably get the same answer. From this clear ruling it seems the government cannot now table the same Agreement and vote again on it before the end of this week when the PM goes to the European Council.

If she goes to the Council and gets some material change to the Agreement then she could return to the Commons next week and seek another vote. Meanwhile the ruling should also have implications for some other hardy perennials that this Parliament likes to go over and over again. Several times we have voted down staying in the customs union. We have voted down a second referendum. We have voted down the Cooper-Boles-Letwin idea of taking over the Commons agenda to legislate for Brexit delay. Perhaps now these cannot be put again either.

It is also true that the Commons approved a motion against leaving without an Agreement. That however contradicts the legislation the House has passed, where the legislation will take precedence unless amended.

I am urging the Prime Minister to go to the Council at the end of this week and tell them we were leaving without signing the Withdrawal Agreement. I am asking her to table a free trade agreement and to invite them to talks as we

leave the EU in accordance with their timetable. I do not see why the UK would seek an extension to Article 50. So far Ministers have been unable to come up with any plausible reason why the EU should grant us an extension.

---

## Two offers of delay

The Withdrawal Agreement is a deliberate expensive delay. It means we do not take back control of our laws, or our money or our borders for at least 21 months, and probably for 45 months under the extension built into it. That would take us well beyond the next General election, and would mean no Brexit for six and half years from the referendum! Remain forces would then be arguing the referendum was out of date and we have to just accept staying in. It also means trying to negotiate our eventual way out under duress, with the EU pocketing all they want in the Withdrawal Agreement and likely to demand even more sacrifices for little in return. There would also be the backstop, likely to keep us in the customs union in perpetuity.

There is then the nebulous “long delay” of recent briefings. No time limit, no price, no legal basis has been set out, because of course there is no such agreement as yet. Does it come with continuing full membership? If so they would have to fight the European elections, which the two main parties have no wish to do. Or would it come with some new lesser status, in which case it will need elaborate UK legislation and a new Treaty like the Withdrawal Treaty Parliament has twice rejected.?

So there we have it. An actual very expensive long delay which Parliament rejects, or a theoretical long delay which the 188 Conservative MPs who voted against delay could not accept. What a silly idea that we have to choose between a disaster and phantom.

The default option remains leaving without signing the Withdrawal Agreement, which remains the best option. Then we could get on immediately under EU rules with negotiating a free trade agreement with them. The government should table one now to avoid new tariffs and barriers if the EU agrees to negotiate an FTA.

---

## High Street day

I made my way to Wokingham town centre on Saturday to participate in High Street day. Parking was easy and I found a good choice of food for the weekend meals. It is encouraging to see the growing range of shops emerging

from the big redevelopment.

---

## I see no reason for a delay in Brexit

The Prime Minister gave her word many times that we would leave the EU on 29 March. The Conservative Manifesto said we would either leave with a good deal or with no deal. The government has had 2 years eight months to negotiate a deal, and to put in place everything needed to leave with a series of mini deals without a Withdrawal Agreement. I do not see why we should now change this approach and ask for a delay.

The EU has said it will not re open negotiations on the Withdrawal Agreement. Unless the UK can take the money back off the table and insist on leaving free to make its own trade deals and settle its own laws and borders as part of a new negotiation there is no point at all in a delay. Such a delay proposal would never be accepted in the EU.

Some people argue that the UK needs a longer time for Parliament to hammer out a consensus. There is no sign that Parliament will be able to do that. It could have done it at any time over the last couple of years but chose not too. The minor parties oppose Brexit outright and Labour has moved to a position of effective hostility to a proper Brexit. Labour has always seen Brexit more as an opportunity to damage the Conservatives and press for an election by playing up differences rather than looking for a national consensus, which is the normal attitude of an opposition in the UK. There is no reason this is about to change so the main opposition parties will suddenly want to work co-operatively to find the elusive compromise most people can accept.

The EU has always said we cannot negotiate a trade deal with them until we have left. That is why the best course of action for both sides from here is for the UK to leave on 29 March, but both sides to immediately enter serious talks about a free trade deal. This would allow both sides to carry on without imposing tariffs and new barriers to trade whilst we negotiated the details of the Free Trade Agreement. A long delay with us still in the EU would put off any negotiation of our future trading relationship, adding to business uncertainty and putting off investment.

The government and the private sector have prepared for a March 29 exit, and have spent money on stocks and other arrangements. There would be understandable anger by many if all that has been wasted.

The "long delay" idea needs whole hearted Labour support, EU consent, and is still in search of a sensible purpose for it. With 188 Conservative MPs voting against any delay Mrs May has no government majority for delay! Those who threaten us with a delay have to explain how and why.