Why do so many in the media ignore the most important points about our economy?

The UK establishment media are usually slaves to Treasury spin and Bank of England error.

Throughout the Osborne years as Chancellor we were told the main thrust of economic policy was to bring down the deficit. 80% would be achieved by spending cuts and 20% by tax increases. I set out regularly from the Treasury's own figures that public spending carried on rising in total in cash terms, and edged up a little after allowing for inflation. In normal language this meant 100% of the large deficit cut achieved relied on a very big increase in tax revenue. Some of this increase came from higher rates, particularly on VAT, and some from lower rates on higher incomes which generated substantial extra income for the state. It was of course true that some programmes suffered from actual cuts, and areas like the NHS and schools with no real cuts were squeezed more than under previous budget plans. It was also true that areas like Overseas Aid and EU contributions marched remorselessly upward. The Chancellor sought to gradually relax the tough controls and cuts Labour had imposed on capital spending towards the end of its period in government as it wrestled with its huge deficit.

More recently last spring I highlighted the addition of a monetary squeeze to the fiscal squeeze going on and predicted this would lead to slower growth. That duly happened. The tax attacks on housing in the 2016 budget and on cars in the 2017 budget meant these areas suffered especially. I have yet to hear or see interviews asking why we need a combined monetary and fiscal squeeze, or even much acceptance that this is what is happening. This slowdown has nothing to do with Brexit. The economy performed well for the first nine months after the vote, when the official forecasts predicted an immediate collapse and a recession in winter 2016-17 which did not of course happen.

There have been too few examinations of how the UK establishment so misjudged the adverse impact of joining the EEC, misjudged the dreadful impact of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, misjudged the Euro ignoring the obvious structural weaknesses which led to a series of Euro crises, misjudged the banking boom and bust and most recently misjudged the impact of a Brexit vote. One golden strand, which in their hands turns out to be base metal, links them all. Any economic project which comes from the EU is always favourably rated, and is usually bad news. Remember the "golden scenario" they said the Exchange Rate Mechanism would bring about? Or the huge extra growth that the Euro would foster? When you look at economic history you discover that a scheme which could be good for jobs and growth has usually been at best disappointing and at worst downright hostile to progress.

More money for social care

I have been lobbying for more money for social care for both West Berkshire and Wokingham. We are the bottom end of the grant levels and have a high cost area for making provision. I was therefore pleased to hear the Health Secretary offer an additional £240 million and have asked for details. He has not yet published the list of allocations by Council area.

Interest rates, savers and borrowers

Many people over 50 have money on deposit. They would like interest rates to go up. Some retired people think it is unfair that they have been prudent, not spent all they earned, and now find tiny returns on the cash they put by to supplement the pension.

Their children and grandchildren may see it differently. Lots of people in their twenties and thirties think house prices are too high and think they cannot afford to buy. This generation of twenty somethings has more graduates and higher wages than previous generations, but a lower percentage of home owners than their parents at the same stage.

So what is the right answer on interest rates? To keep them low for a bit longer. There is no great inflationery pressure to worry about.The UK government is pursuing a fiscal squeeze and keeping taxes very high, so higher rates as well would be damaging overall. It would redistribute a bit from young to old which we do not need to do.

Relieving the pain of higher taxes would also help. Take down the cost of buying a home by cutting Stamp Duty. Cut business rates which are worsening the pressures on traditional businesses. Upward only rent agreements for shops are being overthrown by market forces, by renegotiation and by bankruptcies and financial restructurings. Business rates remain obstinately high and rising.

These judgements are always a difficult balance between the interests of borrowers and lenders. Past gross mismanagement by Central Banks and the commercial banks they lead and control has made an extended period that favours lenders more of a necessity. Japan had a more spectacular boom and bust crash at the end of the 1989s and is still living with zero interest rates as a result. Japan also has no inflation.

During this period when long term borrowing costs are very low by historic standards, there is a good case for businesses and individuals to borrow more for worthwhile projects and investments. There is also still a good case for shifting borrowing longer where possible to take advantage of still relatively low long term rates. The UK is short of capital investment in a wide range of areas, and needs to press on with substantial new investment in the digital wave, to increase productivity to allow more better paid jobs and to replace future low cost jobs with technology.

Heathrow and noise

I held a further meeting with Heathrow management last week at Conservative conference. I stressed that there are still many complaints about noise levels and concentrations of flights, particularly with easterly winds. People remain unhappy with the changes which were made to the flying routes and Compton gate in 2016.

Heathrow promised me they are reviewing the concentration policy and will announce a formal consultation around the turn of the year. I will keep you posted and have renewed my representations against past changes and current practice. I want fewer flights over any one place, with quieter flying at greater heights. All this is ppossible with modern technology.

Beware the cold winds from Central Banks

The Bank of England has pursued an energetic monetary tightening since the spring of 2017. Two interest rate hikes,a withdrawal of credit facilities to commercial banks and a major FPC tightening on car loans, some mortgages and consumer credit have helped slow the economy markedly. This has reinforced the fiscal squeeze,with higher taxes and a lower deficit, which is also pushing the economy into slow growth.

In the USA the government in contrast is keen to promote growth. It has done so by tax cuts for all and some state spending increases. As a result the US economy has accelerated well. This week the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board declared war on this policy by letting us know that there will be more interest rate rises to come to brake the economy's progress.

Markets had been expecting a shallow rate cycle, with a peak official rate of around 3%. There is no undue inflationary pressure, and wages have been going nowhere in real terms despite the low levels of unemployment. The Fed now seem to be implying they think their current rate of 2.25% is “behind the curve” or too low. Markets were duly spooked. Longer term rates rose sharply, the cost of US government borrowing went to a new high for this cycle, and stockmarkets fell.

This icy blast will be felt around the world. There has been a general tendency to higher rates and monetary tightening all year, and that will now get worse.Most at risk are the badly run emerging economies with too much dollar and other foreign debt. We have seen big currency falls in places like Turkey, Argentina and Brazil, with falls by most currencies this year against a dollar buttressed by rising rates.

Central Banks should ease up a bit. Their ruinous policies caused the boom and bust in 2005-10. They have been rightly in atonement for their bad decision to deflate their credit bubble too quickly in 2008, keeping rates low and encouraging banks to rebuild damaged balance sheets to make the system more resilient. Moving too quickly to higher rates is a destabilising move which they should avoid. There is no “normal” higher rate they have to get to.

Debt is sustainable all the time the borrowers keep their jobs and all the time the interest charges stay around current levels. Pushing rates too high too quickly undermines both these conditions for sustainability.