

Change in the High Street

I am a man who likes going to the shops. It is good to see the merchandise, look at how the stores present and price their products, and be able to talk to the staff about the rival claims and characteristics of items on display. When buying fresh vegetables and fruit it is good to choose the items in person. When buying clothes it helps to try them on before purchase. I am well aware I need to buy some things from my local convenience store on a regular basis if I want it to be there in future when I need an item in a hurry. I am also busy, so I find the internet is a great way to buy things I already know about. I can buy them quickly at any time of the day or evening, any day of the week, often at good prices.

Collectively we consumers are voting for more and more of our buying by internet. The market share of mail order never got much above 10%. Internet purchases are now fast approaching a quarter of all things bought from retailers, which is taking a large chunk out of the turnover of traditional High Street stores that rely on sales through their shops. As a result some High Street chains and individual shops are struggling to compete and survive. The big brand retailers that have developed a good internet offer alongside their stores, and have learned how to use internet and shop together to meet customer demands, work well and are still profitable.

The recent decision of Mr Ashley to re brand House of Fraser as the Harrods of the High Street, seeking to trade from most of the old House of Fraser units, will be a bold challenge. Can he find the right merchandise at the right prices for these stores? Can he train and maintain the right expertise and customer friendliness in the staff so people come back to the stores? Will he be able to add an on line offer and approach that is complementary to the shops?

The Treasury has done its bit to hasten the decline of the weaker shop groups by combining high business rates on retail premises with demands for National Insurance on higher wages (wage rises which are needed), and new pensions and training levies that raise the staff costs more for the traditional retailer than for the internet competitor. I hear the Chancellor sounding off about imposing an extra tax on the internet competitors on the principle that if it is working and going well let's tax it. I don't understand why he thinks we need to tax business more when you can never have enough successful business. He would be better employed working out how to get the tax burden down on the High Street, than on thinking up plans to tax the successful newer businesses in ways which may discourage their investment in the UK.

What can a Leave voter do to expedite our departure from the EU?

Many who write into this site are keen to leave the EU. They often write in condemning most of the current elected politicians, and either make no positive suggestions on what to do or ask Parliament or the Conservative party to do things for which there is no majority. Today I would like to make a suggestion. In a Parliamentary democracy it is of course the prime duty of elected people to lead the debate and to make the decisions only Parliament and Councils can make, but it is also crucial to a successful democracy that the public are engaged and public opinion is an important part of the democratic process.

The first thing all Conservative supporters can do is to reply to the letter they have received from the Prime Minister. They could make clear to her that the draft Withdrawal Agreement and the Chequers style Future Partnership do not give us back control of our laws, our borders and our money as required by the majority in the referendum vote, as they tell me on this site. They should urge her to move on from the Chequers proposal, which the EU does not accept anyway. She should now table a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement and complete preparations for leaving on WTO terms with no Withdrawal Agreement. She should make this clear to the EU that that is now the UK's intention.

Anyone with a vote in the UK can also write to their own MP and stress to them they find the Chequers proposals and draft Withdrawal Agreement unacceptable, and urge them to oppose them. If the MP has already stated their opposition you could even write to them and offer support for the stance they have taken.

Anyone can also let the media know by ringing phone ins, writing letters to papers and putting out messages on social media that they oppose Chequers and oppose the draft Withdrawal Agreement. The people made this wise decision to leave. The people now have to help deliver it in the face of opposition from some in big business, Parliament and the civil service. The opponents of Brexit need to be reminded the people meant their decision and intend it to happen in a timely and positive way.

Swallowfield village store and new housing

I officially opened the modernised and improved Post Office and Village stores in Swallowfield today. I also was invited in to see one of the new and renovated houses and one of the remodelled flats. They are delightful new

homes finished to a good standard.

Swallowfield Parish Council has taken advantage of a government initiative to allow local communities to undertake projects for themselves that improve community amenities and environments. The Localism Act 2011 granted these additional powers. Swallowfield Parish owned land called Fieldfare in the middle of the village. Using the enhanced powers under the Act they have redeveloped the site to provide additional rental accommodation and an improved shop and Post Office.

I thanked all involved and agreed that the development and refurbishment has greatly improved the appearance and facilities of this central part of the village. I was pleased so many people turned out for the opening, and urged them to make good use of the shop. These popular local facilities do need regular custom to survive and flourish.

[Reply to a letter from the Prime Minister](#)

Along with the rest of the Conservative party I have received a letter from the Prime Minister about her Chequers proposal for a deal between the UK with the EU.

I agree with much of the content of her letter. In it she assured me “We will take back control of our money, our laws, and borders, and begin an exciting new chapter in our nation’s history”...“We will leave the EU on 29 March next year” “I remain clear that no deal is better than a bad deal – and we are stepping up our no deal preparation” “The two options on offer from the EU (for a future partnership) at the moment are not acceptable to me, or to the UK”.

So far so good. Unfortunately the letter then seeks to persuade me that those fine principles and aims as stated often by the PM are reflected in the draft Chequers proposal and in the detailed clauses of the draft EU Withdrawal Agreement that the government has said it is happy with if all else is agreed. It appears the PM has been misled by her advisers, as the Withdrawal Agreement as so far drafted, the transitional period and the Chequers ideas for the future relationship do not in any way reflect those aims and principles.

The transitional period so called means we do not leave the EU on 29 March 2019 as promised. Instead she will ask Parliament to amend the Withdrawal Act we have just passed to give many powers back to the EU.

The proposed settlement on people means we live with a new version of freedom of movement.

It delays taking back control of our fishing grounds and agriculture.

It leaves us accepting large swathes of EU law in perpetuity, in return for the privilege of being able to import their goods and food!

It enslaves us to making payments to the EU for many years distant, not just for the final two years of our departure, when there is no legal requirement for us to pay anything after March 29 next year when we leave.

The draft Agreement and the proposed future relationship does not achieve the PM's aims as stated in the second paragraph of the letter, aims I agree with wholeheartedly. She needs to press on with the WTO option so we can get all our money back from March 2019 onwards,

The government should not sign the draft Withdrawal Agreement with the EU

I have advised the government not to sign a one sided Withdrawal Agreement. They have always confirmed they will not sign it unless and until it is balanced by a good Future Partnership Agreement, which is still nowhere to be seen. I need to remind them why the present draft Withdrawal Agreement is thoroughly unsuitable for the UK anyway.

The UK voted to leave the EU and its complex binding legal Treaty architecture. We will do so thanks to Parliament passing the Notification of Withdrawal Act and the EU Withdrawal Act. We did not vote to recreate much of the legal structure by immediately signing a new binding Treaty with some of the characteristics of the one we are quitting. The long and complex document is mainly written for the benefit of the EU, to lock the UK into continuing financial and legal obligations that are not appropriate to an independent country.

Several clauses assert the supremacy of European law and the ECJ. The EU side believes any such Agreement is ultimately a matter for the ECJ to interpret. Article 4 requires the UK and UK courts to follow ECJ decisions when taking cases under the Agreement. The Joint Committee to be established to police the Agreement can refer matters to the ECJ for adjudication where the two parties disagree, and the EU side thinks they should have the right to do this even where the UK does not want the ECJ involved!

Extensive rights are to be granted under the Agreement to EU nationals who come to the UK after we have left but are still in transition, and family members qualify after we have left even though they have not come to the UK prior to departure. In other words the UK does not have the right to decide its own borders policy after departure for many EU citizens.

The draft Agreement also seeks to restrict the UK's freedom to run its own benefits policy after March 2019.

The Agreement is wide ranging, seeking to bind us in to elements of the common Home and defence policies, trade and goods regulation, public contracts and various regulatory bodies.

It offers comprehensive immunities and exemption from UK taxes to a wide range of senior EU officials, and provides for secrecy over various EU matters.

The financial provisions are particularly detailed and onerous. Clauses 133-6 provide for continuing budget contributions and pension payments long after we have left, with prolonged exposure to the European Investment Bank risks without access to any new loans.

We voted to leave intimidating legal restrictions and Agreements like this one, not to volunteer for another.