

Ownership for everyone

I would like the budget to do more to help create a new generation of owners.

Surveys show that many people would like to be able to buy their own home. Many would like to be their own boss and run their own business. In recent years the UK has established a good rate of new business formation, but has struggled more with widening home ownership. The government's Help to buy schemes have assisted, but the proportion of people owning their own home is still below levels it reached in the past.

One of the issues that government needs to consider is that of planning. Councils who want to help get homes built can find they suffer from ways the development industry can game the system. A Council often wants to concentrate new building in a given location so that the costs of providing decent roads, schools, surgeries and the rest are kept under some control, and the strains imposed on public services and the transport network in the rest of the area are minimised.

Developers who can take advantage of the planning permissions for the new settlement or for the extension of the settlement can decide to build out the permissions at a slow pace. They can then with other landowners apply for planning applications elsewhere, claiming the Council area is not keeping up with the demands of the local plan to provide more homes. The developer may say they have a good reason to go slow on the main site for commercial reasons. This can lead to the grant of further planning permissions outside the local plan, which then will require further infrastructure and public service investment that has not been in the budget.

In a plan led system this can be difficult for the Council concerned and can impose more disruption from building work around a local community that had signed up to growth in stated locations. The government needs to think how this perverse incentive can be removed in areas where the local plan is allowing a good rate of new build where developers co-operate.

European defence

The UK is firmly committed to NATO which remains the main way that Europe's defence is organised. NATO ensures the participation of the USA. It preserves individual country control over when and whether their forces will be committed to NATO missions, whilst also including the important NATO guarantee for members to assist if any NATO country is threatened.

The EU is now pushing towards more defence integration with an EU role. The aim is to bring together the defence industries of the member states, to

enter common procurement programmes, and to move from there to defining more EU defence operations. The USA is in two minds about this development. On the one hand the USA would like the European countries in NATO to make a bigger contribution to their own mutual defence. On the other hand the USA does not wish to see the NATO system undermined in any way.

There are doubts about whether the EU has in mind spending more and buying more equipment. It is more likely they wish to exercise more control over the budgets that member states already have. The UK out of the EU should examine each of the main procurement projects and see if it makes sense to join as a co purchaser and contributor to the project, where the EU would like the UK's purchases and or expertise. The UK can also offer to join EU missions and assist with troops and equipment where that is in our mutual interest and compatible with NATO's views and role. What we need to avoid is being sucked into a system of defence procurement and mission definition that impedes our role in NATO or leaves us without central capabilities we need as an independent country.

Brexit will be good for our economy

Despite the best efforts of the Bank of England to slow the economy, the latest figures for manufacturing output were good. In the last three months to September industrial output rose by 1.1% . It was up by 2.7% on the year. September was a particularly strong month with a gain of 0.7%. the UK is a great base for manufacturing with a competitive exchange rate and a skilled workforce capable of driving industrial success. Inward investment has remained at good levels reflecting this.

We also read last week that Facebook is looking for 700,000 square feet of office accommodation in London to help its big expansion plans here. Google already has 1 m square feet of space at Kings cross. The new US giants of the digital world are growing fast. They like the UK as a go ahead destination for their plans.

A positive budget for business and for consumers would add to the progress we are making, as would a pro growth monetary policy. The opportunities for inward investors are considerable as the UK considers how to use its new freedoms once out of the EU to create stronger industries in areas like fishing, farming and energy where EU policy has acted as a constraint.

I have often drawn attention to the contrast between what is happening and what was forecast by establishment commentators were we to vote for Brexit. Far from costing us jobs and losing us investment, we have witnessed jobs up and investment strong.

There is great scope for investment in import substitution, as we seek to put some more balance into the large imbalance of trade with the EU which has

built up during our membership.

Wokingham Choral Society on Saturday 11th November

I attended the Choral Society's Remembrance programme of music and readings held at All Saints Church on Saturday night.

The singing was wonderful, with a particularly moving and powerful rendition of part of the Mass for Peace, the Armed Man. The choir allowed the Sanctus to ring out sonorously.

I would like to thank all involved in organising and producing such a great event on the eve of Remembrance Sunday.

PESCO and EU defence

As I understand it the UK will not be signing up to PESCO, the new system promoting more EU defence integration. This is a system under the control of the EU institutions and therefore would not be appropriate for the UK as it leaves. The UK is offering defence collaboration, mainly through NATO. The UK is offering a bilateral Agreement UK/EU where both sides keep a veto.