

The Boris article

I do not see the Boris article as a leadership bid or an offside comment. It is a clear statement of the possible gains from Brexit, by a senior member of the government speaking for the government. It is a reminder of how we can and should be better off by implementing the decision of the voters. It was good to see the reminder that we want to be able to scrap VAT on items that should not attract it when we take back control of our taxes, and to be able to spend more on public services when we get our money back.

Productivity

Productivity is an ugly sounding word from economics. Some are worried by it as they fear it means job losses, restructurings, making people work harder. Curiously enough it is a word which apparently unites the warring political parties. They all claim to want higher productivity. Some even understand that increased productivity is the key to higher real pay and better living standards. If business can produce more with less, prices can be lower or specifications and quality higher, and we can afford to buy more or better.

Agreeing to support the general cause is as good as it gets. As we discovered again on Tuesday in the Finance Bill debate, productivity is also a word which divides, as different parties have different views of what you need to do to raise productivity, and where you might apply the policy.

I detected once again a distinct unease by Labour to discuss public sector productivity, for example. This is odd, given that Ministers- and indirectly MPs – have much more influence over how the public sector is financed and managed than we do over the private sector. I pointed out that during the long Labour years 1997-2010 there were no overall productivity gains in the main public services, at a time when private sector productivity was advancing moderately every year. It would be good to know from them why that was, and what they learned from the experience of presiding over a large sector with no clear gains.

The public sector has struggled with the digital revolution more than the private. The application of computer technology and robotics to business is transforming many areas of our lives. The UK public sector still does not have proper computerised records and controls in the NHS, tax has not yet gone fully digital and robotics are not much deployed.

The public sector has had access to substantial sums of capital to transform the way it does things, but has also had a disappointing record at implementing change through large computer programmes.

[Pound hits \\$1.36 -because of Brexit?](#)

Today the pound got back to \$1.36, a fraction off the pre referendum low earlier in 2016.

This follows hints that the Bank might put interest rates back up to 0.5% where they were before the vote. Given the wish to blame everything on Brexit maybe we should say thanks to Brexit the pound has soared in recent weeks.

[Visit to Arborfield Mill Weir by pass project](#)

I went to see the works that have been carried out by the Loddon adjacent to the A 327 on the edge of Arborfield to the west.

I was told that the idea of the scheme is to assist fish and wildlife and to reduce the risk of flooding to the A 327.

I welcome any scheme that does reduce flood risk, and look forward to seeing the results.

[Where is Overseas Aid when you need it?](#)

The decision of the UK to guarantee it would spend 0.7% of its National Income every year on Overseas Aid has been contentious. Some dislike the idea of committing to spend without assessing need and capacity to spend wisely. Some dislike the way the UK is one of the few countries to honour this international obligation whilst rich countries like Germany (0.5%), Italy (0.2%) and France (0.37%) do not bother. Some just think we have more pressing priorities at home and should confine overseas aid spending to crises and humanitarian disasters.

Most people in the UK probably agree with the government -as I do – that the UK should send immediate relief to British territories in the Caribbean

to provide food, shelter, clothing, and medical assistance to those caught up in the disaster. Most probably also think the UK should help those countries rebuild their shattered towns and homes by offering practical and financial help. Surely this would be a cause for overseas aid that would unite more people than it would divide? What better use of part of our large overseas aid budget?

However, the spending of overseas aid is subject to rules and guidance from an international body. Apparently the Caribbean islands concerned did not have a low enough national income when the hurricane struck to qualify for overseas aid. I fear the hurricane has taken care of this in the short term, but international accounting definitions and data seem to be getting in the way of commonsense. I hope our Overseas Aid Secretary gets them to think again. I would like us to be generous to help these islands, and think it should be paid for out of our substantial Overseas Aid budget.

I expect the government to lobby for a change of definitions. As one of the few countries that hits the international target we should have some leverage on this matter.

While we are about it, they also need to review definitions of which military expenditure counts as Overseas Aid. When we commit our forces to peace keeping or peace making in a civil war torn country, that too should count. Peace keeping is often a crucial step to restoring or creating prosperity in a poor country. Without a peace businesses cannot flourish and people find it difficult to go about earning their living.