

[Dinner with Iain Duncan Smith and Wokingham Conservatives.](#)

On Friday evening local Conservatives met for an excellent dinner at the Sand Martins Golf Club. Our guest of honour was Iain Duncan Smith

Iain spoke to us as one who has dedicated so much time, effort, and fund raising to working with a range of charities to give people a better chance in life. He has worked with those who help people off drugs and alcohol, help equip people for work, assist those who are disabled and and young people who need access to sport, recreation and other facilities. He was the architect of the main welfare policy, making it always worthwhile to get a job with help from the Employment service to do so.

He gave us the benefit of his experiences, told us an amusing story about his time as a senior Minister, and set out how a Labour government would be damaging to our country.

[Conservative Home article on small boats and costly trains](#)

It is not against the rules for Conservative Governments to do popular things. Sometimes it seems Ministers think it is. Other times Ministers say they want to do popular things but the courts, the officials and the quangos somehow conspire to do otherwise.

The Prime Minister announced early on one popular thing he wants to do. He wants to stop the small boats. Even the political parties who welcome high levels of migration have to say they agree with that aim. The vile trade of illegal travel across the Channel risks people's lives and makes the traffickers an illicit fortune, so all have to condemn. Yet a year on it still goes on, with legal challenges to every attempt to decide cases against illegal arrivals, and to any suggestion that might make the UK a less attractive destination for these people.

A way through surely is to pass a short amendment to the legislation saying that nothing in Human Rights law or Human Rights court can overturn the settled will of Parliament to stop the small boats by the specified means. So far it has not been to stop the boats, but to stop the Ministers stopping the boats. Opposition parties join in gleefully with that, expressing the wish to stop the boats but opposing all ways to do so short of simply letting everyone in.

This week it has been difficult to fathom why the Government has embroiled itself in media stories about the cancellation of a new train line to Manchester, when the Conservative party chose that very city to show its affection for the North. It chose to take its own business bringing its Conference there, creating more demand for the trains. As someone who voted against HS2 when Parliament made the decision to go ahead with the project I thought the business case at the time was very flimsy. That was with costs of around £30bn and with five days a week train commuting in full flourish. They shifted the case from taking a bit of time off the journey to a case based entirely on the alleged need for extra capacity. Today with the work commuting five days a week model broken and with costs around £100bn the business case has fallen over completely.

I travelled up to Manchester on the morning work train from Euston to get to Manchester at 8.45am after just two hours and fifteen minutes of travel. The train was practically empty despite it having myself and some other Conservatives making their one use of the train to Manchester this year for the conference. My return train had on it the passengers from another cancelled one as well as those of us who had booked it. That too had plenty of empty seats. Where is the case based on capacity for this new train line? Will they publish up-to-date usage and fare revenue figures?

I found the Ministerial line to take that they did not comment on speculative stories quite bizarre. Ministers were all refusing to simply say they were pressing on to build out the railway they had approved, so the media was quite entitled to ask what was going to happen instead. If they had to create this uncertainty the very same week we were all in Manchester they should have at least told us that costs were out of control, the timetable for the work is too delayed and so they are looking at options to see how the project can be carried forward with realistic cost and sensible outcomes. It would be wrong not to do that work.

There are many popular things the Government could do to win back lost Conservative voters and to find some new friends. The Prime Minister's wish to help the motorist is an excellent idea. Small business runs on vans. Families need cars to get to work, to take children to school and to pick up the weekly shop. Left wing Councils masochistically take pleasure in fining, banning and hectoring anyone who dares to get behind the wheel. They are constantly spending large sums wrecking the roads for drivers. Having identified the need to help people, the Government needs now to will the means as well as the end.

Better guidance to Councils will not be enough. They must cut off funding for anti motoring schemes. They must regulate against Councils deliberately narrowing or closing sections of main roads. They must require speed limits to be proportionate and enforceable given the nature of the road. Very low speeds should of course apply near schools at the beginning and end of the school day and in locations where there are plenty of pedestrians seeking to share the road. Main roads with proper pedestrian crossings and light controlled crossings in built up areas do not need to be 20mph.

This Conference showed that many members want a low tax higher growth kind of

Conservatism. We want the Government to succeed. We think that being a bit more Conservative is the way to get better answers for the country and to win back lost voters who after all voted for a Conservative Government in large numbers in 2019. To bring tax rates down and live with wonky Treasury models the Chancellor needs to slow the growth in public spending so the deficit does not carry on rising and is not thought to be rising by the Office of Budget Responsibility.

Official figures reveal the shocking news that UK public services have suffered a dreadful fall of 7.5 per cent over three years in their productivity. This means around £30bn extra to run the same services, before all the extra money also needed to pay for all the inflation on top. Ministers need to lead senior officials and chief executives throughout the public services to get back the lost productivity as a matter of urgency before going on to use new technology to boost productivity further. We do need extra medics, teachers and uniformed personnel but we need to run off some of the extra staff recruited to the civil service and similar roles in the quangos. Do this by staff freezes and natural wastage. Getting £30 bn back would go a long way to let us cut taxes. Then the Treasury would find out once again that if you cut the tax rates you often get extra revenue as more people do more and pay more. The deficit comes down faster and your options improve.

The Conservative Party is a low tax party by instinct. It should back the strivers as well as the drivers. It should not only stop the small boats but help on the small businesses. It should offer a hand up not hand outs to those in need who can flourish in work. It should be generous to those who through illness or disability need financial and other support. Conservative principles of opportunity, self discipline, choice and freedom are still much needed.

The Government will become more popular if it applies more of these Conservative instincts to the challenges of our times. It is not against the rules to do popular things,. Conservatives do not need to be more right wing, or to become some ideological cult. We need to show our commonsense, our humanity and our understanding that we need to work with the grain of human nature. It is the banners, the high taxers, the Government knows besters, the over regulators who should be unpopular. The left are always telling us they know best, they are morally superior and we must do and say as they tell us. Conservatives should live and let live, help people live their dreams and make their own choices.

[Visit to Guide Dogs stand](#)

During party conference I visited the Guide Dogs stand in the Exhibition area to thank them for all they do . They told me of their campaign to avoid

hazards on pavements which I agreed to pursue as well with Ministers. They are based in Burghfield and operate across the country.

[Telegraph article on ageing populations](#)

They are at it again. The UK economic establishment drips pessimism on so many fronts as it makes wild and wrong forecasts which deter investors, frighten entrepreneurs and damages confidence needlessly. This time we are told an ageing population means ever rising costs of pensions and healthcare which will require ever rising tax rates. It will, they suggest, eventually prove unaffordable.

As always you should query their understanding of the numbers and doubt their long range predictions. In a table of 127 countries the UK is well down the list of ageing populations in 43rd place, close to the USA at 50. The current average age of the UK is 40.6 compared to 48.6 in Japan, 47.8 in Germany and 46 in Hong Kong and Italy. The proportion of the population under 20 is a lowly 15.6% in Hong Kong and 16.1% in Japan compared to 23.2% in the UK. They seem to forget that last year alone the UK invited in 1.2 million new people, many of them young. Quite a lot of more elderly people leave the UK to retire in warmer countries. The UK's fertility rate, the number of babies per woman, is below replacement, but is considerably higher at 1.63 than Italy at 1.24, Hong Kong at 1.23 and South Korea at 1.11.

The UK is better than many advanced countries at raising the retirement age and pension entitlement date as longevity increases. It is important going forward that we continue to do this so that people pay in for pensions sufficiently to cover the costs of their retirement. The UK public sector has failed to reform its pensions as the private sector did, leaving taxpayers with large bills for index linked pensions that were unfunded or inadequately funded. This should be reformed for new entrants.

The key to granting realistic pensions and meeting the bills lies with achieving decent economic growth. With growth tax revenue expands more rapidly than the economy, as every additional pound of activity is taxed more highly. As individual and company incomes rise so higher rates of income tax are paid and more items attracting VAT are bought. The problem so far this decade is threefold. There has been too little overall growth thanks to high tax rates, lockdowns and wars. There has been a productivity slump in the public sector with more spending and less output. There has been a big inflation driving up public sector costs and above all the interest burden on the state debt. We cannot go on like this. It is not the fault of any ageing in the population but the result of a public sector whose costs are out of control and whose output has fallen. The UK put up corporation tax whilst our neighbour Ireland kept it low. Ireland collects four times as much company tax per head as the UK as a result. What a stupid self inflicted wound.

Indeed, the elderly are part of the solution, rather than being the main problem. There are many in their 60s and 70s with energy and abilities,

and some with savings who can return to the workforce, or set up their own businesses and self employment at times of their choosing, or offer help to their children to free them for more working hours. Many already do this, but there are hundreds of thousands who might like to do more if the tax system was friendlier and the support more easily obtainable. The slump in self employment with a loss of 800,000 self employed since February 2020 includes a lot of older people. If the government changed the IR 35 rules to make it easier to win contracts more might return to do some jobs for people and for reward. If the VAT threshold for registration was raised more small businesses might expand and offer part time employment to older people. If the rules on childcare and childcare taxation were amended more grandparents might help more to boost the working age workforce. None of these imply compulsion or conditionality. They offer people better choices and the chance to increase their incomes if they wish.

The economic establishment has created the problems of high public spending and high borrowings. The Bank forecast inflation of 2%, gave us inflation of 11% and still denies all their money printing had anything to do with it. Now they seem to want a recession as they lurch to too little money and credit. The OBR regularly overstates the deficit by £100 bn or more, usually underestimating tax revenues, yet presumes to tell Chancellors they must raise taxes to tackle the deficit of their imaginings. The very well paid senior management of HS 2 runs with large delays and more than 3 times budget but offer no explanation of why they were so wrong and no hope they might be able to put it right. The civil service recruits tens of thousands more staff but cannot explain why its productivity has fallen so far.

If we run the public sector better, control inflation and use tax cuts to expand work and capacity we can afford decent pensions and health care. So banish the establishment pessimism, improve its forecasts and pep up its management.

The Conservative offer

It is good that Conservatives defend people's right to choose the schools for their children, and support educational charities. It is progress that Conservatives back getting more of our own oil and gas out of the ground instead of importing more. It is welcome that the government will make it more difficult for Councils to pursue their anti driver agendas.

The Prime Minister's five aims of cutting NHS waiting lists, lowering inflation, getting some growth, bring the deficit down and stopping the small boats are fine. Some of these will need new policies and initiatives to deliver them. What we need this week is more detail on how these important changes will be brought about. If the courts seek to block sensible migration reform then Parliament must be asked to legislate to redirect them.

The government needs to be on the side of the doers, the strivers, the self employed, the small businesses, the savers, the home buyers, the skilled

workers as well as helping the drivers. We need to unleash more enterprise to expand our domestic capacity, replace some of those imports, generate more better paid jobs at home and collect more tax revenue from more activity.

To do this we need an early budget. Tax rules and rates that are driving people out of self employment need to be reversed. The VAT threshold that stops many a small business expanding for fear of the heavy compliance costs of VAT and the 20% extra imposition it entails should be raised. Energy is far too dear and is just getting dearer as OPEC stifles oil output and drives up the prices again. The taxes on it should be brought down as the oil price rises.

The government should lead an ownership revolution, making it easier and more worthwhile for people to venture their savings, to set up and grow businesses, to work for themselves, to buy their own home and to invest in their local community.

It should promote more domestic supply, to give us more choice, better value and to cut down on all that CO₂ long distance transport by ship and lorry imposes to bring in so many imports. Why not spend our agricultural grant money on promoting more food growing to cut the food miles, instead of using it to wild what were good farm fields? Why not bring down energy taxes so more energy using industries can stay here and grow here?

Conservatives need to be the low tax party, the enterprise party, the back Britain party.