

The Business department loves imports

BEIS stands for the Department for Business, energy and industrial strategy. I wonder if it has quietly been repurposed as the Department for Blocking Enterprise and for Import Success.

Its Energy desk is turns down or delays new oil and gas field developments at home. It prefers the UK to import LNG from around the world, creating more CO2 when that is burned than if it had allowed us to produce more natural gas from the North Sea. It has set out a so called transition plan which is a plan to run down our own domestic gas and oil industry whilst we will still be needing those products from elsewhere.

Its industry desk is busy imposing high carbon taxes on all our businesses that need to burn gas to transform materials with heat as well as encouraging higher prices for fossil fuels by limiting domestic supply. Our steel, ceramics, glass and similar industries are struggling to keep open against cheaper foreign competition which does not face such high energy prices.

Our steel industry needs specialist coal for its furnaces. The department blocks a potential UK mine that could supply them, again forcing imports. Our steel industry almost halved under the last Labour government from 18.5 m tonnes to 9.7 million tonnes by 2010 is now around just 7 million tonnes. We import much of what we need.

Our aluminium industry has been reduced to just one main smelter of ore running on Scottish hydro power. The Anglesey and Lynemouth smelters are long gone with no plans to rebuild our ability to make this essential metal thanks to energy prices and availability. Our petrochemical industry has been slimmed as the availability of domestic feedstock has reduced.

Isn't it time for a rethink? You do not save the planet by outsourcing most of the high energy and gas using products you need. You transfer the CO2 production elsewhere and with it the jobs, added value and security of supply we need at home. If the government wants to level up it should grasp the importance of ceramics to the Potteries, of steel to Sheffield, of chemicals to Merseyside, of oil and gas to Aberdeen and many other locations for all of the above.