

There are other options to Chequers

One of the most bizarre lines the government is currently using says there is no alternative to Chequers. The government knows full well there are other options. After all it is working on one itself which it tells us will be ready by March next year, the option of leaving without a Withdrawal Agreement. This one avoids payments of £39bn and allows us to choose our own tariff schedule for trade under WTO rules with the EU like the rest of the world.

There is also the Canada plus plus plus deal. This would entail leaving with a Free Trade Agreement with the EU based on the one Canada has recently signed, with additional barrier removal thanks to starting from a position of few barriers as members of the same customs union. There could be no tariffs rather than the few tariffs that remain in the Canada one. There could be a better range of services agreed given we start from a common position on services. There could be a security partnership added. The EU has offered a Canada style free trade agreement, only with an unacceptable position on Northern Ireland. It should be negotiable to persuade them that there is an easier solution to the Irish border problem than the EU makes out, so the Free Trade Agreement applies to Northern Ireland alongside the rest of the UK.

David Davis was working on an alternative to Chequers in the Department before his resignation. Presumably the government recognises that as a possible option. The government is doubtless working on an alternative to Chequers that might command the support of the EU , given the substantial objections they have made so far to the proposal.

There's four options that are not Chequers which the government has worked on, so it's not sensible to say there is no alternative.

There has also been a campaign to ask the ERG to produce their proposal instead of Chequers. Yesterday the Group presented research to show that the Irish border is not a problem that requires Chequers or the EU backstop. If you accept this detailed proposal, then the other options become possible and the need for Chequers falls away.

Various think tanks have also produced plans. My view is leaving without signing the draft Withdrawal Agreement is very difficult to beat. Saving £39bn and completing exit next March to end the uncertainty looks like a good plan to me.