

## Tiers and national lockdowns

When we held the debate and vote at the beginning of the month on the restrictions placed on business and social contacts, we were told to look forward to a review in mid December when areas might be taken down from Tiers 2 and 3 into Tiers 1 and 2. The government was allowing people to believe that the restrictions would bear early fruit resulting in gradual relaxation.

The rapid approval of the Pfizer vaccine in the UK gave a boost to confidence, with some eventual end in sight to lock downs as people at risk get the protection they need and want. The USA has now also approved this vaccine and I guess the EU will follow, showing that the world professional establishment does not think the UK Regulatory Agency was taking undue risks or coming to a hasty conclusion.

Then we saw a surge in cases of the virus detected by the much more comprehensive testing scheme available compared to last Spring. Official advice hardened in favour of tougher and more prolonged lockdowns. By the time we reached mid December word went out that instead of taking a number of regions or areas down a tier, there would be a substantial net increase in places under the toughest Tier 3 restrictions. Ministers seem to suggest now that restrictions will be with us until next spring, when the arrival of warmer weather and more natural ultra violet light might cause recession in the virus, and when many more people will have opted for the vaccine protection. Then last evening there was a further change with the invention of a new Tier 4 for a quarter of the country and cancellation of most of the Christmas relaxations for the rest of the country. Parliament needs to debate and vote on these measures.

It appears Parliament will have another chance to debate and vote on these controls only later in the new year. I will present a case again to find other methods of protecting the vulnerable and keeping more people safe, whilst allowing the resumption of more business activity. Livelihoods matter as well as lives. The scarring to business life in entertainment, travel, leisure, shop retail, commercial property and some personal services is very pronounced. We run the risk of more bankruptcies, more people deciding to pack up their small businesses, and more people deciding working for themselves is simply too difficult with all the regulations.

I will pursue again the issue of the trials of other drugs that might help treatment, the use of isolation hospitals and the extra Nightingale capacity to ease the situation in District General hospitals, the improvement of ventilation systems in indoor venues to clean the air continuously and other methods to allow more safe business activity to take place. There needs to more strenuous official efforts to find an alternative to these severe controls on economic and personal freedom.