

Letter to the Health Secretary

Dear Matt

Thank you for your tireless work to bring down the death rate and slow the spread of this nasty disease. You have asked MPs to share ideas and concerns with you as you battle the virus. You have always rightly stressed that you will take advice from medics and scientists and be guided by their professional expertise. In your position you have access to the best advice the country can offer, to various strands of academic work on the nature and behaviour of the disease, to the experiences of doctors dealing with seriously ill patients and to pharmaceutical companies seeking drugs and a vaccine.

There are various opinions coming from medics and scientists as they seek to understand and treat this new disease. Your medical and scientific advisers have to draw together the strands and make judgements about what is best advice. I think it would help the public understanding and support for the policy if you could set out more information about current professional thinking in the following important areas.

1. Treatments for Covid 19. Several existing drugs have been proposed as alleviating symptoms or shortening time to recovery. The UK is I believe undertaking trials of these drugs to see which if any works. Can we have a progress report?
2. Understanding the serious forms of the disease. Is it correct that whilst many die of a pneumonia like disease of the lungs, some die from excessive blood clotting and others from attacks on various organs of the body? If so, what different treatments are being used to combat the different versions of the disease?
3. Given the way the disease spreads in hospital and care home settings, why do we not move to identifying some hospitals as isolation hospitals specialising in Covid 19 and free others for non Covid patients?
4. You place great emphasis on R or the transmission rate, and are now supplying calculations of this rate by region. Does the UK yet have random sampled test results of the population as a whole, as this over time would presumably give the most accurate view of the transmission rate. When will we have a sufficient time series of such data to be more accurate over R which is often currently expressed as a wide range.
5. Face masks are regarded as an important part of protective clothing for nurses and doctors treating Covid 19 patients. We all agree they should have them and supplying them is the priority. Both voluntary and commercial effort could make other masks for people going into social and work settings to offer some protection against spreading a disease they may not know they have. Is guidance going to be modified, subject of course to the overriding priority of supplies of surgical grade masks for those nursing and treating Covid patients?
6. What do your advisers think about the use of Vitamin D to strengthen people's defences against the virus?

Yours

John

Dear Constituent

Unemployment has risen sharply, and many people on furlough are worried about whether and when their jobs will return. I have been pressing hard for more people to be allowed back to work in safe ways.

I am pleased to report some progress in recent days. Many of you wanted Garden Centres to re open and waste tips. Both have done so this week with social distancing rules in place.

The Government passed its new Agriculture Bill through the Commons this week. I wrote about my contribution yesterday. I am pressing hard for more of the government support to be grants to assist the expansion of market gardening. There is considerable scope for the UK to grow more of its own fruit, vegetables and flowers, and to expand the glass house space to do so. It will also create many more jobs for local people to help.

Builders are resuming work and homes can be bought and sold again. Car factories are starting up and other industrial production is underway. There will still be a substantial hit to output and incomes, given the way social distancing limits how much can be produced in any given factory.

The government has set out a timetable for limited returns to school before the summer break. Some of you are very keen to see the schools re open, conscious that children need formal education and will miss out without school. Some are nervous about safety. The good news is CV 19 does not normally cause health problems for children. The bad news is grandparents may need to stay isolated from their grandchildren for longer, especially where they are vulnerable through other medical conditions.

The worst affected areas remain leisure, entertainment and hospitality. There will be delays before they are allowed to re open, and substantial restrictions on how many people they can serve once they are allowed to trade. Shops too are struggling, with more being done on line. There are no easy answers to these problems, where the businesses themselves are going to have to adapt to changed circumstances.

I have successfully urged a strong response from the Bank of England to make money available and from the Treasury to provide grants and loans to individuals and businesses who have lost their incomes. I am now urging the government to put in place more policies for economic recovery. These include tax cuts to assist the self employed, small businesses and individuals wanting to buy a house or car .

I passed on wishes to allow more sport and outside activity. It was easiest making the cases for fishing and golf which have now been relaxed. All of us can now go for walks or runs as often as we like.

Food and trade

On Wednesday I had booked slots to speak on the Amendments to the Agriculture Bill about trade, and on Third Reading where I wished to discuss how we promote more home grown and home reared food. I joined the debate remotely and listened to it, only to discover they had booked more slots than available spaces. I was not called on the Amendments, and the 3rd Reading debate lasted for 3 minutes, front benches only. So let me tell you some of what I wanted to say. My views are being sent to ministers as well.

I want us to have more free trade agreements and high standards of food production. I see no need to accept food from countries with unacceptable animal welfare practices, nor to lower our standards in order to secure a Free Trade deal. More importantly, the government has promised it will not dilute our current standards. Free Trade Agreements with other countries will need Parliamentary approval and will be properly reported and debated in the House. It is common in Free Trade Agreements to respect each other's regulatory systems through the doctrine of equivalence, where there is possible. Where it is not then the trade continues under WTO rules.

The government has decided to keep certain EU permitted practises for the time being, though one of the wins from leaving the EU is we can impose our own higher standards where we wish. We will, for example, continue with rules which allow chlorine wash of salads and vegetables. The EU disagreement over chlorine washed chicken is not with the chlorine washes which they accept. Do those who object strongly to US chicken wish to see us ban chlorine washes for other items?

The government is pledged to maintaining levels of financial support to farmers that they were receiving under the EU policy, but to spend the money differently. The Bill grants powers to allow the government to support investment in better food production and requires the government to consider and report on food self sufficiency levels. I want the government to have ambitious plans to promote much bigger output of fruit, vegetables and flowers here at home by providing financial and regulatory support for more greenhouses and more mechanised market gardening. We also need to recruit more local labour to help with this important industry.

The future of pubs, hotels and tourist attractions

As the lock down drags on, so the summer season will rush by. We need to ask what does the future hold for those who have invested their lives and savings in small hotels, B and Bs, pubs, clubs, tourist shops and attractions.

If the climate remains hostile to larger gatherings of people for July and August as well as May and June, the summer season will be badly damaged for these supporting businesses. In areas of great beauty or historical interest small businesses depend heavily on the summer income to see them through winters of low volumes or partial closures. Visitor numbers are often driven by access to festivals, sporting events, great houses open to the public and magnificent scenery which is best in sunshine.

It is possible for many of these businesses to survive for the time being. They can put their staff on furlough. They can get some delay on taxes and rent. What they cannot do is go a whole year without the higher revenues of summer. They need a clearer picture of what July and August might bring, when government is cautious as it depends on success with limiting the spread of the disease.

It is also a question of what business model can these enterprises come up with to be compliant in an age of social distancing. How realistic is it to run a restaurant with 2 metres between diners? Can screens be used instead? How do people get served drinks in a pub without a jostle at the bar? How many people can a small hotel or B and B handle whilst keeping people apart and keeping common areas free of virus from the occasional infected person who is unaware of their condition?

The long decline of the High Street will be accelerated by recent events. So might we end up with fewer pubs and fewer tourist businesses. How long can a firm keep workers in furlough before there has to be revenue earning employment or redundancy?

I would be interested to know how you would respond to some relaxation in these areas? Would you go to a pub or restaurant if they opened soon? What changes would you want them to make to handle the virus? Would you consider a week-end break or a holiday somewhere in England later this summer?

West Berkshire Recycling Centres to

open

I have received this update from West Berkshire Council:

West Berkshire Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) are set to reopen to allow residents the opportunity to dispose of waste and recycling that cannot be safely stored at home. This follows publication by the government of updated guidance indicating that visits to recycling centres can be considered essential under certain conditions.

From **Thursday 14 May** both of our recycling centres, which are located at Newtown Road in Newbury and Padworth Lane, near Aldermaston, will be reopened. The sites were closed temporarily on 24 March following announcements by the government of lockdown restrictions. In order to manage demand, a **booking system** is in place and you will not be able to simply turn up at the recycling centres.

The booking system will be live on the morning of Wednesday 13 May and residents need to book their appointment here:

<https://citizen.westberks.gov.uk/clickandtip>.

When the recycling centres reopen, and to stay within the government's Covid-19 guidelines on essential travel, please remember that journeys to these sites during lockdown should only be made if waste cannot be stored any longer at home without causing a risk to your health and safety. The sites will be open seven days a week from 9:00am to 6:00pm, with the last booking appointment available at 4:30pm.

Working with Veolia, who are our waste contractors, precautionary measures will be introduced to help maintain social distancing on our sites for our residents and staff protection. We will also implement a robust traffic management plan which will help us minimise impacts of traffic congestion on the local road network and to control the number of visitors to the site at any one time.

Residents need to book an appointment and be prepared for the possibility of long queues. We are advising delaying a visit until things are a bit quieter in a few weeks' time or to only visit if you cannot safely store waste at home for the next couple of weeks. Our kerbside waste collections for recycling, rubbish, the garden and food waste subscription scheme and chargeable kerbside bulky waste collection service is still operating normally and residents are advised to make use of them, wherever practicable, in the meantime.

The experience of visiting our household recycling centres will be different and you should only visit the recycling centres if you cannot safely store your waste at home.

Please ensure you:

- Have booked an available appointment online: <https://citizen.westberks.gov.uk/clickandtip> – this will be available from Wednesday 13 May in the morning.
- Check [online](#) to see if all waste materials can still be taken to the site.
- Check the site layout when loading waste into your car. Use these site maps to help you when packing your vehicle: <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/recyclingcentres>.
- Check [travel times](#) and any restrictions in place. Please arrive at your allocated time that you have booked online and not any earlier. There may be delays accessing the site and possibly queues of waiting vehicles. Please bear with us as we work safely on the site to limit contact between people.
- Have your permit, or ID and proof of West Berkshire address with you.
- Have a copy of your booking confirmation with you – either a print out or on your phone.
- Only bring what you can physically carry as we are operating a one person per car restriction – our staff cannot help with your waste when you are unloading your vehicle. Under exceptional circumstances only, and at the sole discretion of site staff, two people may be allowed to leave the vehicle to dispose of the waste e.g. if they are removing a heavy or bulky waste item.
- Please follow the instructions that site staff will give you and also be polite to members of staff.
- All residents visiting the site will need to observe the social distancing measures in place by keeping at least 2 metres apart at all times.
- In line with Public Health England guidance, residents who are vulnerable, or who are showing symptoms which may indicate coronavirus, should not visit household recycling centres.

For more in-depth information, please read our [FAQs](#).
