

Dear Constituent

There is some good news to pass on. It looks as if the virus spread has peaked in our area. Hospital admissions are down, and the Royal Berks Hospital has plenty of capacity in both normal beds and Intensive Care beds should there be any relapse in progress. The first aim of policy to ensure the NHS can cope is so far working.

This also means the NHS has capacity for the other killers and serious conditions that people contract. Patients should not be deterred by the priority to the virus. There are additional hospital facilities in the private sector that the local NHS is using for cancer and other conditions. The NHS wishes to provide a good service to anyone who is seriously ill.

I have continued to pass on contacts who can supply protective clothing to our public services, where there are shortages. West Berkshire and the Royal Berks Hospital report no problems, and Wokingham Social services is managing with help from national and regional stocks. The government is well aware of the need for more and is working with the national and overseas suppliers on schedules and deliveries.

More testing is becoming available. There are local test centres at Whiteknights in Reading and at the Community Hospital in Thatcham for NHS and care staff. The aim nationally is to extend the range of people eligible for tests as the supply increases.

I am urging a managed return to work for more people. Working practices will need to be adapted, but business shows every willingness to do so. There will be social distancing, more home working, more use of remote technology, more screens, more protective clothing and more automation. I am very conscious of the economic damage being done, and keen to promote more safer working as the obvious way to improve things.

I spoke in the debate on the economy yesterday using the video link from home as MPs were encouraged to do. It demonstrates there are ways to adapt and to do our jobs in these difficult times.

Taking back control requires the restoration of sovereignty to the British people

Let me go back to the Brexit discussions we were having before Covid 19 monopolised the agenda. Sir William Cash spoke to the Brexit conference

about the clauses he helped the government produce to reassert UK sovereignty in the Withdrawal Agreement. They were essential, given some of the rest of the text.

The legislation makes clear that nothing in the Withdrawal Agreement "shall derogate from the sovereignty of the UK". The Act allows Parliament to debate and vote against any measure the EU proposes during the so called Implementation period up to the end of December, when we finally leave all aspects of EU control. This is important to prevent the EU attempting to tie us into unacceptable and damaging measures before we are free.

The Act includes a method for the UK to reject unwanted legislation during the Implementation period should the EU try to damage us. The European Scrutiny Committee of the Commons can refer an EU proposal for a debate and vote to determine whether it should become part of UK law or not.

I was pleased to see recently the Treasury is at last going to propose getting rid of the tampon tax, but only effective from next year. I want them to add getting rid of VAT on green products and domestic fuel at the same time. We need to show we have taken back control of our taxes by altering VAT, an EU tax and removing it from things we do not wish to tax.

It is also important that we become an independent coastal state with full control over our own fishing grounds this summer. We should ensure much more of the fish is landed in the UK, and where we need time to build up our fishing industry capacity we should allow a period of recuperation of fish stocks after the bruising impact of continental industrial trawlers.

The Current UK negotiating position is strong and needs to be kept up. We do not want any delay beyond December and wish any Agreement to be based around a Free Trade Agreement. We do not wish to perpetuate EU controls over our economy.

Getting the numbers right

I am glad to read today that the government is dropping the Chinese death figures from CV 19 from its deaths graph, as they cannot be sure about the basis on which they are compiled.

They might like to adjust the other country death figures to numbers per million of population to make them a bit more meaningful. There will still be differences in basis for regarding a death as a CV 19 death, and differences from density of population and other factors not related to disease management and healthcare.

I also read that London paramedic advice is being altered to ensure a higher proportion of Covid 19 cases are taken to hospital. If this is true, then the

London figures for hospital admissions becomes a useless guide as recent figures will clearly be relatively higher than older figures.

The government needs consistent and accurate figures as a basis for decision making. Hospital admissions was the best series they showed, as I assume they have in place the right procedures for counting patients actually in hospital. They also said they tested the patients to see if they had CV 19.

No-one has any idea how many people in the community have or have had CV 19.

Silence over the collapse of the car industry

During the long debates about Brexit Remain MPs and campaigners centred much of their argument on the plight of the car industry in the UK. They falsely claimed Brexit would disrupt supply chains from the continent, ignoring the fact that substantial numbers and volumes of components come into UK auto factories today from non EU sources with no border issues.

They often alleged we would end up with EU tariffs against our cars whilst presumably imposing the same 10% tariff against theirs. That is the tariff the EU makes us impose today on EU vehicles. They wrongly said this would be very damaging, refusing to accept that were that to happen UK factories would sell more to UK customers whilst losing some sales to continental ones.

They wanted to create the impression that an important industry would lose sales heavily and suffer loss of investment and jobs as a result. Instead major motor manufacturers pledged their continuing support for making cars here.

Over the last year or so there has been a large collapse in car sales, especially of diesels. This is a big loss to the UK which has done much to improve the cleanliness of diesel engines. The UK is a major diesel engine producer. This sales drop has nothing to do with Brexit. It is the direct result of the EU/UK policy of trying to get diesel and petrol cars off the road as part of the decarbonisation policy, and to switch as many people as possible from personal transport to public transport. In the last few weeks the impact of anti virus policies has exacerbated this trend and further worsened the plight of the industry.

In the first quarter of 2020, mainly before the lock down, sales of diesel cars in the UK fell by 51% and of petrol by 36%. In March the trend grew worse with a fall of 62% for diesels and 50% for petrol vehicles. There was scarcely a word from all those Remain campaigners and MPs about this disastrous plunge in sales and output by the industry, yet it has been on a scale out of all proportion to their falsely pessimistic forecasts about Brexit. Why the silence? If they truly cared about the car industry why are

they not demanding policy change?

The government increased new vehicle taxes in the 2017 budget which harmed the industry. The Bank of England tightened credit for car loans which harmed output. Government announcements about the need to move on from diesel and petrol put people off buying new ones. Isn't it time those who shed false tears over a Brexit impact that was never likely to happen, shed some genuine ones over the current situation? All our car factories are presently closed. There will be reduced working re-opening of some next month. The problem is not just the virus, but also the underlying policies towards modern petrol and diesel cars.

Well done Dominic Cummings

I am pleased senior advisers go to hear the scientific advice at SAGE meetings and ask questions about it. Good policy advisers listen to specialist advice in order to use the wise bits of it in policy.