

Government fund to help Town Centres

In the New Year the details of how Councils can apply for additional money to help modernise or improve town centres will be published. I have told Wokingham Borough of the opportunity to bid for funds, and will also contact West Berkshire to remind them.

12 big wins from leaving in March on WTO terms

- 1 Far from crashing out, we will be cashing in. We will get our money back to spend on our priorities. We will be better off.
- 2 We get control of our taxes allowing us to cut VAT along with other taxes. This will boost our growth rate and give all taxpayers a Brexit bonus.
3. We can hire more nurses, doctors, teachers, and police, and improve our social care with money saved from the EU
4. We can sign new trade agreements with the rest of the world to boost the majority of our trade currently with non EU countries.
5. We can remove tariffs on imported components to provide a boost to UK manufacturing.
6. We can restore and expand our fishing and fish processing industry.
7. We can have a farming and tariff policy that means we grow much more of food locally, cutting the food miles.
8. We can control migration and have a policy good for UK business and society.
9. We can make our own laws and refuse EU ones which are damaging.
10. We will end all the uncertainty for business
11. We can end the rows and the wild and usually pessimistic speculation about Brexit. We can turn to talking about other matters, and bring the nation together in discussing how to use the money and freedoms we have gained from exit.
12. We will become a self governing democracy again.

Leaving the EU is not a threat or a disease, but a huge opportunity.

8 things wrong with the Withdrawal

Agreement

1. Signing the Withdrawal Agreement gives the EU what they want, taking away most of our bargaining power.
2. The financial commitments are open ended, with some very long lasting. They will doubtless be much more than the Treasury £39 bn forecast. This is money given for nothing in return that we do not legally owe them.
3. We have to accept and follow any law they pass for the next two years or more, without any vote or voice to try to stop laws that damage our interests.
4. We cannot sign any trade deals with other countries all the time we stay in the so called Implementation period.
5. Under the Agreement we might be another 45 months stuck in the EU, making a total of 78 months or six and a half years from our decision to leave. Parliament promised to enact the decision of the People's vote, not to delay it indefinitely.
6. The Irish backstop splits the UK up.
7. The Withdrawal Agreement is legally binding. The Political Declaration is a vague wish list including the contradiction of a possible free trade agreement and a possible customs partnership.
8. Far from ending business uncertainty it prolongs it and makes it worse, as it makes a good outcome for the UK less likely.

This is an unbelievably bad Agreement for the UK and a great one for the EU. It is not a deal, as it does not offer the UK any of the things the PM said she wanted. It is an invitation to much more uncertainty and more talks on worse terms for the UK.

Leaked Letter from Dame Lucy at the unit for co-ordinating Brexit

Readers will remember past leaks from a senior official, Dame Lucy. Another has come to my attention.....

Dear Frank (I'm not sure who he is)

The Prime Minister is rightly pressing on with the Withdrawal Agreement. As you know, the Cabinet Office has been strongly behind this initiative, as it offers us the best chance to protect all that is best about our current membership whilst fulfilling the letter of the remit to leave the EU on 29 March 2019. We have carried out a substantial scoping exercise, and presented Ministers with the enormity of the task, reflecting all the inherent agreements and arrangements that have arisen from 45 years of membership of the EEC/EU. We have also responded to those Ministers who have said they are

looking for a compromise between Remain and Leave, and wish to reflect the Opposition position that there must be no damage to jobs and trade. Some Ministers as at the Treasury and Business recognise that it will take a lot of time to try to get these features of our current membership into any future partnership agreement, though they would like to do so.

The truth is there has been no Agreement on offer which duplicates our membership of the Customs Union and single market which also meets the requirements to exit freedom of movement and to leave the EU. Because of this we worked with the EU on the sequencing proposal. Now it is established that the UK has to sign up to the money and a number of important obligations up front to reassure the EU, we can proceed to highlight the possible addition of better trading terms and some agreement on customs once the Withdrawal Agreement is signed. As you can see from the WA we have allowed plenty of time, with 21 months to be followed by up to a further 2 years. This means of course there could be one or more General elections before the negotiations are finished. The Opposition policy of wanting to stay in the Customs Union and single market would not be pre-empted before at least one General election had occurred, which might be best in the circumstances, assuming we need all the time laid down to try to sort out a future partnership. Meanwhile, though we have technically left, all obligations and legal arrangements remain the same.

There is concern in the Unit that the WA might not get through the Commons. We have briefed Ministers to stress there might be no Brexit without the WA, and to highlight the uncertainties rejecting the WA will create. We need to help them respond to those who argue that just leaving and trading under WTO terms is a true Brexit. The government has successfully stressed that such a Brexit would be "hard" and like falling off a cliff. We may need to send out more of the material from the scoping survey showing just how many things might change, and how they might change for the worse without the continuity provided by the WA. I understand there are a few large multinationals prepared to forecast problems for supply chains and transport which we must give prominence to. The government is very preoccupied by the Union, so it is good that the EU stresses the significance of the Irish border issues.

This current fluid situation leaves open the danger of just leaving by default. That is why we must draw attention to the risks, and help Ministers stress the advantages of staying in and spending more time trying to get the future partnership right. In practice once we have signed the WA our bargaining position is much reduced, so we also need in private with Ministers to lower expectations of what can be achieved in subsequent negotiations. Treasury and Business seem aware of this, but some other departments are less well informed. We need to ensure the Trade department does not raise hopes of any early breakthrough for a Free Trade Agreement with the USA or some other non-EU state, as that would be seen as provocative on the continent. We also need to ready departments for the rush of new EU legislation likely to come from the new Parliament and Commission, which we must implement thoroughly in our usual way.

Yours

Lucy

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