

Moderating this site

I asked the service provider to protect this site from an excessive number of commercial and automated responses. They have come up with the picture question system which some of you dislike. I also have to go through it each time I moderate and find it works OK. I do not have available another system to keep out so many unwanted responses.

I moderate this site when I have the time. I will repeat again. Long posts, posts with allegations about people and institutions that need checking, and posts referring to electronic sources I do not know may take longer. I leave those until I have more time, which may not be the same day depending on my other duties. Sometimes I just delete them if they look too difficult to understand and check.

I do now sometimes just delete a post from someone who has written multiple posts the same day to cut down my reading time. People who write several shorter posts without material that needs checking may secure more postings as my aim to speed moderate as many as possible may favour them over someone who writes one or two long posts. I am trying to put up a range of views and interesting material from as many as possible, but will tend to err on the side of caution over allegations.

The costs of population growth

There have been various studies of migration arguing that migrants that come to the UK make a net contribution, paying more in income tax and National Insurance than they receive in benefits. These studies ignore the wider picture and do not look carefully enough at all the budgets involved. They are not based on a very pleasant premise when they imply we only want the migrant if they do "make us a profit". It is a pity their calculations are also simply wrong.

When we invite someone into our country we wish them well and want them to live to a decent standard of living reflecting the society they have joined. This means they do need adequate housing, their children need school places, the family requires access to an NHS surgery and if necessary an NHS General Hospital. If just one or two migrants arrive there is sufficient slack in the system, but when 250,000 additional people a year turn up the country has to get on and build the extra homes, schools, surgeries and other facilities they need. We also require extra roadspace and railway capacity. I see this in my own constituency where we have had to provide extra schools and surgeries as the new homes are built.

None of these items comes cheaply. A migrant couple will need a flat or house

which will cost say £200,000 to build and provide. They may need a school place for two children. That could have a capital cost of £45,000. We are currently spending massive sums on increasing rail capacity in London and on HS2, and are beginning to spend more on road capacity. Some part of this is the result of an expanding population.

The figures calculated on revenue costs are based on the fact that public spending does transfer money from working age people to the elderly in more need of pensions and NHS care. It also transfers money from people without children to those with children at school. Migrants who work here for a few years, have no children and then move away may indeed make a net contribution to the revenue budget, but they will need expensive housing and transport capacity on capital account which needs to be put into the calculation.

Mr Trump's threats

It is not easy being the world's superpower. Mr Trump swept into office on a programme of America First. He envisaged doing good deals for the USA. He did not seem keen on military interventions around the world of the kind favoured by the Clintons and the Bushes, by the State department and the Pentagon. Many people warmed to the idea that the west had intervened too much. Maybe the west had resorted to arms in too many cases where it did not have the political ability and influence to settle things well after its force had dislodged dictators or unsettled evil regimes.

Mr Trump has avoided escalation of military involvement in the Middle East. He has tried rapprochement with Russia, though this has been badly knocked by outraged Democrat opposition seeking to allege that it was all to do with Russian help for his election campaign. Just as it seemed he was turning to the main economic matters which dominated his election statements, the absurd and unpleasant dictator of North Korea decides to provoke and taunt the USA with stories of breakthroughs in weaponry, tests of missile systems, and his usual threatening language.

US policy seemed to be based on the diplomatic playbook. The State department engaged with the UN and the leading powers Russia, China and Japan to back an important UN Resolution. This pledges all to seek diplomatic solutions, whilst imposing much tougher sanctions which seek to block one third of all North Korea's exports by value. There are also travel bans and other restrictions imposed on 9 senior officials and four institutions of the North Korean state.

It therefore looked as if it came as a surprise to the US establishment when Mr Trump started talking of massive military responses should North Korea threaten the USA and its allies and territories. They soon came into line with their President and pictures emerged of the kind of weaponry the US could deploy from Guam and their carriers if need arose. This builds on the

traditional exercises conducted annually with South Korea under previous Presidents to display to North Korea ability to fight and resolve to defend.

Some think Mr Trump was right to speak in the kind of language the North Korea dictator uses. Others think it is unhelpful and gives too much publicity to North Korea. I would be interested in your views.

Damage to the car market

The latest industrial output figures for the UK are disappointing but not surprising. In part they reflect a general decline in industrial activity, which was more pronounced in France and Germany last month than here.

They also reflect local matters that are longer term and more worrying. A strong domestic car market up to March 2017 has been transformed into a weak one in the four months since by a combination of higher taxes and tougher regulations. The new levels of Vehicle Excise duties for dearer cars has hit that part of the market badly. The new messages against diesels with the longer term threat to both diesels and petrol vehicles has also had an impact. More people are waiting for further clarification, and to see if electric cars are going to become cheaper and easier to use. Meanwhile the Bank of England is tightening the availability of credit to buy or lease a new vehicle. One of the recent successes of the UK economy in increasing car sales and output has just been damaged by a combination of an attack on the idea of the purchase, and tougher controls over innovative ways of financing it.

Those who dislike cars, wrongly seeing them as the source of all the pollution that matters, may be pleased. They usually ignore the pollution coming out of the bus, train and household boiler. Those who fear any kind of borrowing by anyone to do anything may also rejoice. I think it does matter. I see no special dangers in more people leasing a vehicle. All the time they have the income they will make the lease payments and all will be well. If someone loses their job or struggles to meet the payments then the lending institution will take the car back and sell it on to someone else second hand. They will get something for it, and if they have run a sensible business may even get all their money back on that customer. None of this need be bank threatening!

The UK now has a strong car industry with some excellent factories, products and employees. The fact that these are in foreign ownership does not affect the important underlying reality that the factories, jobs, ideas and energy for these businesses are here in the UK. They export a lot to non EU destinations as well despite the absence of EU trade deals with the main markets. Public policy should look after the industry in a sensible way. Working with them to produce greener and better products is fine. Taxing too much and stifling credit is not such a good approach.

The UK negotiating strategy

The UK government is about to publish a series of position papers on the EU negotiations. It is doing so in part in response to the EU's tactic of publishing lots of papers about principles and problems, whilst refusing to tackle the issues that matter or to set out the EU wishes.

It is most important as the UK does this that it avoids three mistakes. The first mistake is to give any hint of us negotiating with ourselves. We don't want options or details over how the UK position may evolve. We certainly don't want a public exploration of what we might surrender or shift under pressure, as that invites the EU to hang tough and to pocket any offer we make.

The second mistake would be to claim it is all complex or difficult in a way which gives succour to those in the EU who think if they delay and obfuscate enough the UK might weaken or change its mind.

The third mistake would be to ask for too much expecting things that are not obtainable. It is not, for example, in the UK's power to decide what rights going forward will apply to UK citizens living in the EU after we have left. That will be a matter for them to decide, under international law.

The negotiation can be very straightforward. The UK takes back control of its money, laws and borders, as it is entitled to do. The EU decides whether it wants the comprehensive free trade arrangement we offer, or whether they want to face WTO tariffs.