

 bright blue

# Centre Write

Autumn 2023



## Back to business?

Stephen Kinnock MP | John Glen MP | James Ball



Transport is essential for people to lead fulfilling lives by accessing jobs, goods and services, family and friends.

Despite Margaret Thatcher's speech to the second World Climate Conference in 1990 saying we needed to *"make changes and sacrifices, so that we do not live at the expense of future generations"*, the transport sector has effectively wasted the last 30 years. Road transport is responsible for one fifth of the UK's carbon emissions which have remained stubbornly high.

While emissions will fall with the uptake of electric vehicles, with a significant number of petrol and diesel cars still on the road well into the 2030s, this won't happen quickly enough. There is also a shortfall in Government policy to deliver the 68% cut in emissions needed by 2030 to meet our international obligations under the Paris Agreement.

*"We need to make changes and sacrifices, so that we do not live at the expense of future generations"*

Margaret Thatcher,  
1990



# Increasing transport choice to fuel productivity

In 1990, the effects of climate change were uncertain. Today, they are highly visible and intensifying, threatening lives and livelihoods. As UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in March: *"Our world needs climate action on all fronts: everything, everywhere, all at once."*

We need road transport in the UK to do its fair share of emissions reductions. While electrifying vehicles remains important, we also need to increase people's transport choices.

This is something which has been eroded over time. Bus cuts have left many rural areas without useful services, or any buses at all. Meanwhile rail services remain expensive and unreliable. Car based developments and road building programmes have also fuelled a rise in motor traffic. This has created hostile environments for people walking, wheeling and cycling, with two thirds of adults saying it's too dangerous to cycle on our roads. This combination has eroded choice and impacted the economy.

The government has rightly identified levelling up as a priority. However, road building in the south won't help, but neither would shifting it to the north. Investment in public transport, walking and cycling is better for levelling up. It gives people independence, is more affordable and younger jobseekers are



less likely to have a car. It is also better for productivity and the economy.

Despite promises of change in the future, investment in expanding road capacity remains at record levels, and still traffic and congestion is set to rise significantly and to turbo-charge climate change. So why are we spending so much on a solution that will fail to deliver and makes many things worse: air pollution from tyre and brake particulates, microplastics in water courses, loss of tranquillity in our countryside, community severance, and the physical and mental health impacts (and cost to the NHS) these issues cause?

Building roads, many with poor business cases, increases traffic and makes the road network more hostile for others. It also diverts resources from higher value interventions which would better help with levelling up and increasing choice and independence. If we want to build a better future for our children and grandchildren, then in the words of the late Margaret Thatcher we need to make changes and sacrifices. A review of all road building, as recommended by the Climate Change Committee, would be a good place to start.



[www.transportactionnetwork.org.uk](http://www.transportactionnetwork.org.uk)

# Contents

## EDITORIAL

- 4 | Editor's letter  
*Max Anderson*
- 5 | Director's note  
*Ryan Shorthouse*
- 6 | Letters to the Editor

## CORPORATE CULTURE

- 8 | Open for business  
*Professor Rosie Campbell*
- 9 | Generational grumbling  
*James Cowling*
- 10 | Employee benefits  
*Maria Booker*

## INTERVIEW

- 12 | John Glen MP  
*Max Anderson*

## BOOSTING BUSINESSES

- 22 | Captain of industry?  
*Stephen Kinnock MP*
- 23 | Low tax, high reward?  
*Sir John Redwood MP*
- 24 | Skills to pay the bills?  
*Kate Fairhurst*
- 25 | A lust for power  
*Ben Hopkinson*

## FUTURE COMPANY

- 28 | Tech totalitarianism?  
*James Ball*
- 29 | JobsGPT?  
*Jeegar Kakkad*
- 30 | Charitable foundations  
*Sarah Vibert*

## POLITICS

- 32 | Why I'm a Bright Blue MP  
*John Penrose MP*
- 33 | Research update  
*Bartek Staniszewski*
- 34 | Tamworth Prize 2022  
winner  
*Jude D'Alesio*

## REVIEWS

- 37 | The young Alexander  
Alex Rowson  
*Thomas Nurcombe*
- 38 | The Russo-Ukrainian War  
Serhii Plokyh  
*Cosima Zaveta*
- 39 | Conservatism: a  
rediscovery  
Yoram Hazony  
*William Prescott*



Bright Blue is the independent think tank and pressure group for liberal conservatism.

Chief Executive: Ryan Shorthouse  
Board of Directors: Alexandra Jezeph, Diane Banks, Phil Clarke & Richard Mabey

Editor: Max Anderson  
Design: Joseph Silke  
Cover design: Chris Solomons  
[brightblue.org.uk](http://brightblue.org.uk)



Interview: John Glen MP (p.14)



JobsGPT?: Jeegar Kakkad (p.29)

# Editor's letter

**Max Anderson** introduces this edition

It has been nearly a year since Bright Blue's last *Centre Write* magazine, and in that time we have witnessed one of the most turbulent, yet morbidly entertaining, periods in British political history.

Whilst the printers yearned for another *Centre Write* edition, we have seen three different Prime Ministers occupy Number 10, witnessed a continuing land war in Europe and struggled to cope with an ever-worsening economic situation.

As the situation grows ever bleaker, most people in the Westminster bubble have already turned their attention to next year's election, curious to see what vision each party might offer.

“ **Businesses face a never-ending parade of crises: Brexit, COVID-19, rising energy costs, spiralling inflation and rising interest rates** ”

We have been lucky to have a taste of what might be to come. At the start of the year, the current occupant of Number 10, Rishi Sunak, set out his five targets for the coming years. In response, we saw his opponent, Sir Keir Starmer, set out his own five missions for Government - we love the synonyms.

What both agree on is that we need to get the economy growing. Businesses face a never-ending parade of crises: Brexit, COVID-19, rising energy costs, spiralling inflation and rising interest rates. It is, therefore, no surprise both political parties are trying to dress themselves up as the real party of businesses.

But, as politicians try to appeal to the private sector, many corporations are stepping over into the political world in

ways we have never seen before. Whether chasing social trends, setting the venue for political battles or even taking on governments themselves, the growing impact of businesses on the political canvas must not be overlooked.

This is what this edition of *Centre Write* will explore. Not only what the Government should do to support businesses and the wider economy, but also whether businesses should be allowed such political sway.

The first section of our magazine explores 'Corporate culture.' **Professor Rosie Campbell** (p.8), from King's College London, looks at the importance of an open and diverse workplace, to help improve both the physical and mental health and productivity of both male and female staff.

**James Cowling** (p.9), Founder of Next Gen Tories, then answers the invaluable question for both businesses and politicians: what do young people want from work?

We then look at the relationship between corporations and their staff, as **Maria Booker** (p.10), Head of Policy for Fair by Design, suggests ways businesses can support their staff through the cost-of-living crisis.

I sat down with **John Glen MP** (p.12), the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, to discuss how the Government plans to grow the economy, the role of businesses in society and his illustrious career in the Treasury.

Shadow Minister for Immigration, **Stephen Kinnock MP** (p.22) then opens our 'Boosting businesses' chapter, where he looks at Britain's industrial strategy and how Labour aims to make industry thrive.

On the other side of the Parliamentary

aisle, **Sir John Redwood MP** (p.23), the

former Conservative Party leadership contender, looks around the world for inspiration on how to best level up the UK, concluding that the market must take the lead instead of an intrusive state.

**Kate Fairhurst** (p.24), former Head of Office at the London Assembly, looks at the skills shortage holding back the UK's economy and how local partnerships can be formed to boost economic growth.

The importance of a thriving, green energy sector is not lost on **Ben Hopkinson** (p.25), Researcher at British Remade, who argues that without it, Britain's industrial heartlands will be lost forever.

Finally, we have our 'Future company' section. Journalist **James Ball** (p.28) looks at the growing battle between government and big tech and the issues with the Online Safety Bill.

The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change's **Jeegar Kakkad** (p.29) looks at the other side of the tech coin and whether automation is an opportunity or something workers should be worried about.

Then, with charities' ever-growing role in nurturing the economy, **Sarah Vibert** (p.30), Chief Executive of NCVO, asks what is next for the industry.

Finally, **John Penrose MP** (p.32) answers the question why he is a Bright Blue MP.

Enjoy our autumn edition! 

**Max Anderson** is the Senior Communications Manager at Bright Blue



# Director's note

Businesses increasingly cannot avoid politics, argues **Ryan Shorthouse**



**W**e've seen the rise of a more conscious capitalism in recent decades.

Businesses have broadcast a stronger commitment to equality, diversity and the environment. This has often led to changes not just to their marketing, but often to their recruitment and policies too.

What is driving this? Regulation, yes. But also attitudinal shifts. Younger consumers and staff have higher expectations that the companies they buy from or work for are more ethical in the way they do business. They want to see a commitment not just to profit, but purpose, from corporate entities.

The bottom line is that companies need this young talent. They also need these young customers. And are fearful that complaints can be instantly and widely shared via social media, damaging institutional reputations quickly.

That is not to say younger folks, increasingly graduates of a university education, are being indoctrinated into Marxist thinking on campuses. Just before the 2015 general election, High Fliers Research found that almost half of 30 leading universities saw their final-year students most likely to back the Conservatives.

**“Younger consumers and staff have higher expectations that the companies they buy from or work for are more ethical in the way they do business**

Rather, we generally see the same commitment to aspiration, hard work and making money - all of which you can see leading to an economically liberal world view. But younger generations are

progressively becoming more socially liberal - on race relations, gender roles and sexuality. In essence, they are more strongly supportive of cultural cosmopolitanism.

This points to a greater individualist mindset - both for social identity and economic independence. This should not be mistaken for communalist politics, which foregrounds our social characteristics and pits different social groups against one another, which is being promulgated by a loud but relatively small number of activists.

**“ Businesses need to behave ethically and responsibly, but they need to reflect the quieter majority, rather than the shoutiest voices**

Companies are finding that politics is not just in the domain of their foreign policy, to be dealt with at distance by a cadre of expert professionals and agencies. Politics is increasingly at the heart of everyday company life, especially on cultural and environmental matters. Politics is now very much part of their domestic policy.

How to deal with different behaviours and beliefs among employees. What counts as bad behaviour and how it's dealt with. The climate and environmental policies they adopt. The people and countries they do business with. Companies are having to deal with clashes that need to be resolved consistently and effectively, before they blow up.


Some companies haven't got it right, deeply damaging their brand. The denouncement of Nigel Farage's political views in internal documents has backfired badly for Coutts bank and its parent company, NatWest, leading to days of bad

publicity and executive resignations this summer.

This country's leading business lobby group, the Confederation of British Industry, fell into crisis in the spring when several allegations from women of sexual misconduct by senior staff became public, leading to a withdrawal of political engagement and corporate membership. It survived an Extraordinary General Meeting, but limps on.

The parent company of Bud Light saw a massive drop in sales and its share price earlier this year after a transgender influencer partnered with the beer brand to advertise a personalised can, leading to a huge boycott from more conservative consumers, especially in rural midwestern and southern America.

Last year, BrewDog was slammed for its critical campaign of The FIFA World Cup being hosted in Qatar while continuing to show the football at its bars. An open letter from 100 former employees, who damned the toxic working environment at the company, went viral and the trade union Unite declared that they were "one of the worst employers in the brewing industry."

Politics is jeopardous, but it is a risk that corporates increasingly cannot hide from. They have a massive role to play in achieving better social, environmental and economic outcomes. Of course businesses need to behave ethically and responsibly, but they need to reflect the quieter majority, rather than the shoutiest voices. And they need consistency, not stridency, in their policies. 

**Ryan Shorthouse** is the Founder and Chief Executive of Bright Blue

# Letters to the Editor

Submit your letters to [max@brightblue.org.uk](mailto:max@brightblue.org.uk)

While Matthew Taylor CBE's diagnosis of the NHS's plight is undeniably right ('A healthier system,' Summer 2022), I remain suspicious of his solutions. Taylor advocates for a prevention approach to lessen demand on the NHS, creating capacity for those who truly require it. I am sceptical that demand can be decreased sufficiently to do so. As the population ages, more individuals will inevitably require medical treatment. The NHS is structurally flawed: such a monolith cannot deliver equal health provision. Politicians and regulators micromanage health executives instead of allowing them to focus on the quality of service they deliver, resulting in inefficient bureaucracy and high coordination costs. The NHS gets trapped fighting present fires and remains unable to prepare for the fires of the future. Taylor is right to call for realism in addressing the current capacity crisis, but simply more money is not sustainable in the long-term. Wholesale change needs to be considered, and the competing social insurance schemes of many European countries would be a place to start.

**Nathan Stone** | Bright Blue member

Darren Hughes' article ('Levelling up by devolving down,' Summer 2022) presents a sensible case for further devolution. According to Darren, devolution seems to have missed the core of the country – England outside London. It is refreshing to hear a case for English devolution from the centre-right. Grounding devolution in regional identity is key, and the analysis of the causes for failure of devolution in the North East of England is convincing. And although it is a sentiment I agree with, Darren's wish for a transparent devolution is not articulated further. An accountable devolution process would be a break from the past, and I would have liked Darren to dive further into this discussion. Overall, Darren makes a convincing Conservative case for devolution within England – I could not agree more that Westminster does not always know best.

**Alp Yilmaz** | Bright Blue member



Florian Klauer

In Luke Tryl's piece ('Classroom concerns,' Summer 2022), he emphasises the need to avoid applying American framings to UK issues. While it is important to prioritise the UK context in education, disregarding American framings can overlook valuable lessons. For example, issues surrounding transgender rights can be looked at alongside the recent American controversies surrounding the integration of gender-neutral restrooms in public spaces. Exploring cultural issues from other countries can often empower students to find solutions to similar challenges in their society and gain a broader understanding of the world.

**Taylor Ross** | Bright Blue member

# Become a member of Bright Blue

---

Becoming a member of Bright Blue enables you to support and partake in the championing of liberal conservatism.

You will be an official part of Bright Blue's network - invited to all our events and conferences, with the opportunity to meet a wide range of people who share Bright Blue's positive and open-minded view of politics. You will also have the opportunity to contribute ideas on policies and strategy in various ways - in debates, on our blog and in our magazine.

Join today and receive:

- 🔗 A special member's pass for the annual Bright Blue Conference
- 🔗 Access to members' meet-ups with eminent guests
- 🔗 An exclusive members-only reception each year with high-profile speakers
- 🔗 Hard copies of all our books and magazines

## Donors' Club

---

Join our Donors' Club for £250 per year and enjoy all the benefits of normal membership and invitations to four exclusive dinners per year with a high profile guest of honour. An additional charge of £120 per dinner applies.

## Business Forum

---

At this critical time for the country and the whole world, membership of our Business Forum offers exceptional insight and intelligence. Our Business Forum gives members the opportunity to engage with leading decision makers, opinion formers and thinkers on the centre-right of British politics.

- 🔗 A quarterly dinner with senior opinion formers and decision makers
- 🔗 Hard copies of our quarterly magazine *Centre Write*
- 🔗 Invitations to exclusive parties, such as our annual reception and Conservative Party Conference Drink Tank
- 🔗 Membership of our high-profile Advisory Council, which meets twice a year to offer us strategic advice
- 🔗 An annual intelligence session with a leading opinion former
- 🔗 Invitations to exclusive policy roundtable discussions and dinners

# Open for business

**Professor Rosie Campbell** explains how diverse workplaces have benefits for all



It is time to remake the case for promoting gender equality in the workplace. The overwhelming majority of Britons now reject traditional gender roles and support gender equality at work.

Yet a large minority of the British public (43%) also believe that we have gone so far in promoting women's equality that we are now discriminating against men. A majority of men (53%) agree with this view, as well as a third of women (33%).

Analysis of gender pay gaps suggest that this is quite a stretch. In 2022, the gender pay gap among full-time employees was 8.3%, reflecting the fact that women are over-represented in lower paid roles in organisations and men in leadership positions. These figures exclude part-time workers, the majority of whom are also women, where they are much less likely to receive pay rises or promotions, leading to the so-called 'mummy' trap. Moreover, women are disproportionately employed in low-paid, insecure work. But there lingers a fear, among some, that men might be left behind.

What is driving the gap between our perceptions and reality? A key factor is our failure to take gender seriously. Those of us making the case for change too often talk the talk of gender equality - and this conversation is certainly not done - but to accelerate the pace of change we need to also act and dismantle the gender stereotypes that affect men as well as women. To do that we need to focus on how gender inclusive workplaces benefit everyone.

A gender inclusive workplace is one that recognises several key features of our human workforce: First, we do our best work when we are mentally and physically well. Second, our teams are most creative when

we benefit from diversity of thought. Third, we are most effective and efficient when we can speak truth to power.

All three of these attributes of a healthy workplace are undermined in cultures of hyper-masculinity, where colleagues feel pressure to be invulnerable, are homogenous in background and experience and work within rigid hierarchical structures.

“ More choice about where we work is often accompanied by a growing sense that work is bleeding into every aspect of our existence

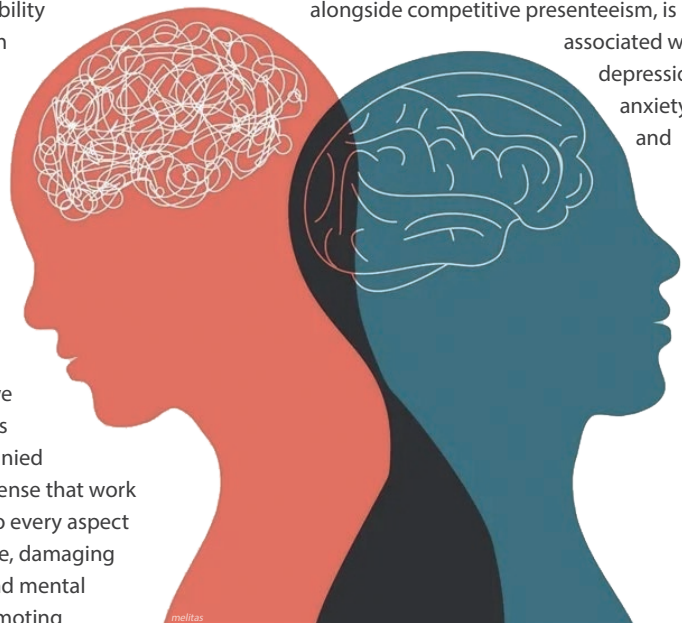
In the aftermath of COVID-19, there is an opportunity for us to give greater respect to the role physical and mental wellbeing play in a productive workforce. However, more of us are also facing the flexibility paradox, a term coined by Professor Heejung Chung from the University of Kent. Many office workers have more choice about where we work, but this is often accompanied by a growing sense that work is bleeding into every aspect of our existence, damaging our physical and mental wellbeing. Promoting

a positive work-life balance for all – including frontline workers – would benefit men and women, as well as the bottom line.

This trend is exacerbated by cultures that valorise overwork and are prevalent in many high-reward male-dominated sectors and roles, typifying a toxic masculinity that discourages men from spending time with their families and looking after their physical and mental health - and too often excludes those, especially women, with caring responsibilities. An 'always, always on' culture is toxic for both men and women.

This is evidenced by a 2022 study of the Australian construction industry. The authors illustrate how the hypermasculine culture predominant in the sector, featuring a 'dog-eat-dog' mentality alongside competitive presenteeism, is

associated with depression, anxiety and






>> burnout among both men and women employees and a high exit rate from the industry amongst women.

Tackling cultures of competitive presentism by focusing on rewarding outputs instead of efforts would go a long way towards both improving productivity

in the workplace and creating a genuinely gender-inclusive working environment. Employers who promote genuine flexibility, with give-and-take from both employers and employees, will benefit from more diverse teams and meritocratic processes, where the most talented - and not those

most able to signal their commitment with excessive hours - reach the top. 

**Professor Rosie Campbell** is the Director of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership and Professor of Politics at King's College London

## Generational grumbling

**James Cowling** delves into what young people want from work

The accusation that “younger people are entitled and lazy; they do not want to put in the graft that got their parents’ generation to where they are today,” is something most younger people have read in newspaper columns and heard at dinner tables for years.

The flippancy of the charge is hardly worth engaging with, but there is a kernel of truth to it - younger generations do have a different attitude to work than their parents or grandparents.

Rather than shirk work from home, it is clear that there has been a shift in priorities between generations. As we emerge into a new post-pandemic economy, the key to a thriving business environment is for employers to understand what people want from work and engage with these priorities in good faith.

“ At a time when salaries are low in real terms, many appreciate the reduced costs of working from home for some of the week

Unlike previous generations which prioritise job security and climbing the corporate ladder, the main factor distinguishing younger generations from Gen X and Baby Boomers is a stronger

emphasis on finding a healthy work-life balance. Indeed, PwC research into millennial attitudes at work found that 95% of respondents said work-life balance is important to them.

Finding ways of adapting to this is in employers’ interests, as happier workers tend to be more productive. Moving away from flexible working would fritter away the significant upsides for young workers. At a time when salaries are low in real terms, many appreciate the reduced costs of working from home for some of the week. One of the few positive after-effects of the pandemic has been the survival of the hybrid-working model. Workplaces are rightly trying to find the optimal balance between office- and home-working.

But there are also more profound impacts on our lives and economy. As younger people age, many feel a need to rebalance their working lives if they are to consider starting a family. With rising childcare costs and fewer families able to afford for one parent to stay at home, working conditions need to become more accommodating. Flexible working significantly takes the pressure off young families, as each parent can balance their time at home to minimise how often they need to seek alternative childcare arrangements.

The caveat is that these changing

attitudes to work-life balance do not remove the fact that cash is king. Deloitte’s Global Millennial Survey has consistently shown that low pay is the greatest source of millennial dissatisfaction. Both in 2019 and 2020, nearly half of respondents cited dissatisfaction with pay as the main reason why they would consider leaving their job within the next two years. In the UK, it is unsurprising that this frustration is felt acutely; real wages have not seen sustained growth for over 15 years.

“ A boom in building new homes, lab space and renewable infrastructure would naturally create a host of new practical, high-paid jobs

The Resolution Foundation calculated that if wages had continued to grow as they had before the financial crash of 2008, the average worker would make £11,000 more per year than they do now, taking rising prices into account.

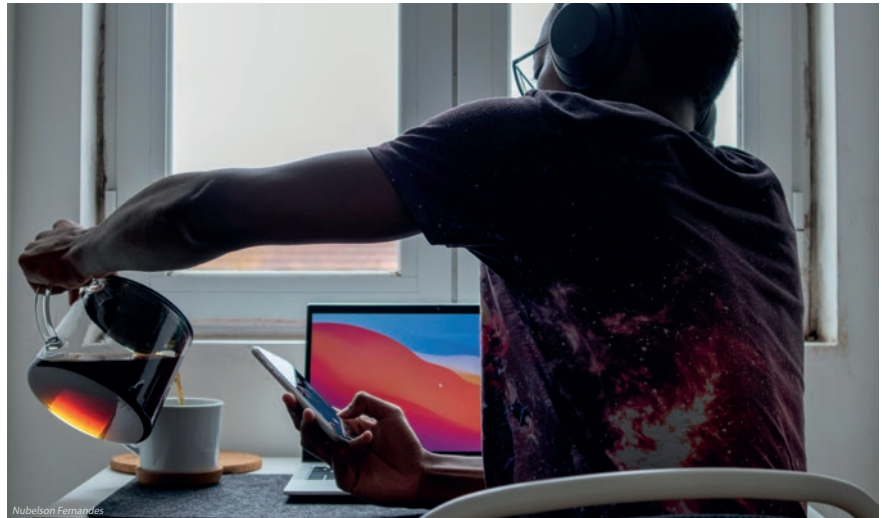
Tackling the low-wage, low-growth spiral will require a greater focus on increasing productivity, which grew at



>> 2.2% a year in the three decades leading up to the 2008 global financial crisis and at under 0.5% a year since. The first part of this puzzle is to upskill our workforce and young people. A glut of low-quality qualifications and university courses has seen a generation saddled with debt, but with many not receiving the skills they paid for. The introduction of T-levels, practical qualifications which train students for highly paid technical jobs in fields such as science and engineering, has been a step in addressing this problem. We need to go further to instil workplace training into company culture, like how the German system of lifelong training became standard practice.

If we are to see real wage growth, the Government must also take steps to reform the planning system, which is easier and quicker to do than skills reform. A boom in building new homes, lab space and renewable infrastructure would naturally create a host of new practical, high-paid jobs.

Finally, Conservatives should reembrace their instincts to incentivise work. Income taxes in the UK have risen sharply, with the



Nubelson Fernandes

average graduate now paying a marginal rate of 51% between the age of 33 and 47. As the fiscal headroom becomes available, the Government should prioritise cutting income taxes first, avoiding the temptation to cut asset taxes to appeal to older voters instead.

Taken together, it is clear that there is a balance to be struck. Policymakers should not be afraid of embracing some of the work-life balance solutions that have sprung

forward in recent years and it would be a mistake to attempt to ideologically push businesses into reverting to old practices. However, incentivising work and cultivating growth should remain core Conservative principles. In the remaining 18 months of Conservative Government, we must make work pay. [b](#)

**James Cowling** is the Founder and Managing Director of Next Gen Tories

## Employee benefits

Businesses can be an innovative help during the cost-of-living crisis, writes **Maria Booker**

**T**he cost-of-living tracker published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) recently showed that 7.3 million UK households on a low income were going without essentials such as showers, transport and warm homes. A total of 5.5 million of those have had to cut down or skip meals because they cannot afford food.

The stress of going without essentials contributes to poor mental health and a loss of sleep. For those going without essentials, the JRF tracker found that 47%

of respondents reported poor mental health and 45% reported a loss of sleep, as compared to 14% of households not going without essentials. This backs up findings from the Mental Health Foundation on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, which found that 10% of adults surveyed in the UK reported feeling hopeless, 34% feeling anxious and 29% feeling stressed.

It is inevitable that all of this will take its toll on performance of people at work. Research shows a strong correlation

between employee wellbeing and productivity and performance.

However, there are a number of positive steps that employers can take to mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on their employees. The pandemic saw many employers stepping in to support their employees in new ways when



>> circumstances changed. The cost-of-living crisis is no different.

First, employers can make sure that they are paying the real living wage to all employees and are in a strong position to engage with external contractors on this issue too. A survey by PwC last summer found that eight out of ten large companies were looking at ways to help employees and 53% were implementing or considering focused pay rises for essential workers. The PwC survey also indicated that employers are looking at one-off bonuses, assistance with other costs such as travel or home insulation, as well as setting up hardship funds.

At Fair By Design, we are particularly interested in how greater flexibility in how people are paid, as well as how they pay for things, can help people on low incomes. Therefore, a



second way that employers could support employees is by setting up an Employer Salary Advance Scheme (ESAS), which enables employees to access their wages as soon as they have earned them - that is, before payday.

Employers can also provide low- or no-interest loans to cover season tickets or electronic equipment. A free or low-interest loan not only enables employees to avoid

paying more for a more expensive form of credit, but it also enables employees to avoid the poverty premium incurred for paying monthly rather than annually for something like a season ticket. Employers should seek professional advice to ensure loans fall within the exemption from having a credit licence.

These solutions can prevent the need to access high-cost credit at a time when credit is scarce and expensive.

In the first quarter of 2023, lenders surveyed by the Bank of England reported a reduction in the availability of unsecured credit provided

to households and a fall in the approval rate for lending. Consistent with Bank of England data, Fair 4 All Finance have found that 44% of community finance lenders had tightened their lending criteria in response to the economic environment in late 2022. Even though application rates were higher, they expect loan approvals to be lower than usual due to tighter affordability criteria and credit risks.

“ The pandemic saw many employers stepping in to support their employees in new ways when circumstances changed

Finally, sensitively offering employees the opportunity to access financial advice and digital literacy training opportunities can also empower employees to get the best out of their finances.

Navigating the cost-of-living crisis is not easy, but employers have a key role to play in maximising the wellbeing and potential of their staff. [b](#)

**Maria Booker** is the Head of Policy at Fair By Design



## Recent publication

Home advantage: a new centre-right vision for housing

*Edited by Mikhail Korneev, Ryan Shorthouse and Bartek Staniszewski*

The housing situation in modern Britain is bleak. We struggle to build nearly as many homes as we have in past decades, real house prices are the highest in over a century, over two-thirds of renters have given up on the hope of owning a home and thousands remain homeless.

It does not have to be this way. This collection offers a glimmer of hope by presenting radical new ideas from leading decision makers and thought leaders in four key areas: security, community, stewardship and conservation. The hope is that this becomes a first step to a clear centre-right vision for providing Britain with the homes it needs.



## **THE INTERVIEW** **The Rt Hon John Glen MP**

**Max Anderson** speaks with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about his time in government, the future of businesses and what the Tories need to do to win the next election

**Your first ministerial experience was in the Treasury in 2016. And you've pretty much been part of the furniture since 2018. How have you found your time working in the most powerful and arguably most important department?**

What I'd say is that the Treasury, for me, is the core of government. So much is driven from the Treasury, to many people's frustrations. I first arrived there as Phillip Hammond's Parliamentary Private Secretary in July 2016, where I worked for a year, and then went to DCMS [the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport] for six months. Then I was the City Minister for four-and-a-half-years, until last summer. And I have been the Chief Secretary since October.

The quality of the civil servants there is very high. When I was doing financial services, I was also privileged to have a lot of engagement with the City and quite sophisticated stakeholders. That was challenging but enjoyable and very satisfying. You were collaboratively trying to find a way to enable growth and create sound but slightly different regulations, post-Brexit, for a sector which is crucial to our economy. And I enjoyed the international aspects of the role.

Subsequently, what I do now as Chief Secretary, deputy to Jeremy [Hunt] in controlling public spending, also brings me now into contact with all my colleagues a lot more. So, I've become 'Mister No,' or 'no, but' or 'No, maybe,' to their frustration at times.

We're all collectively realising that these are challenging times. If we're going to deliver on the Prime Minister's objectives, we've got to have discipline in the way that we spend money and also be creative about how we can achieve more and do things differently. And I say this to colleagues: let's not assume that actually having more money means we get a better outcome in every respect.

**What have you seen as your biggest economic success for the Conservatives since 2010?**

That's challenging at this moment in time. When we came into government, we faced my predecessor's note, which said "there was no money left". And so the first five years in coalition were very, very challenging. We had to make decisions that were quite unpopular.

Then the surprise election victory in 2015 followed by the surprise outcome, for many, with the Brexit vote, which has meant that we've had huge disruption; disruption to the whole fundamental architecture of government, even going so far as to create a new government department to deal with that decision.

But government, especially Conservative governments, have always done the right thing by the country. And we can be very proud of the interventions that Rishi, others in the Treasury and myself have made around the bounce-back loans and the COVID-19 interventions, which are sometimes vilified now, but universally welcomed then.

We saw the Ukraine crisis, precipitated by Putin's illegal actions, in February. Now we have another set of challenges with the cost-of-living challenges, principally around energy.

>> That's been another moment when the Treasury has had to step up to the mark.

I don't want us to be judged only on the levels of debt or tax that we have at the moment, but I do want us to be judged on how responsive we've been to the needs of the economy, as circumstances have presented it. Government, and especially Conservative governments, should be about pragmatism rooted in a clear ideological framework.

**What would you like to see the Government try to tackle before the next election, either economically or wider?**

The big challenge is growth enablement and giving people and the markets confidence that we've taken and are taking the necessary steps to deal with inflation and to see that it comes down. Obviously, the Prime Minister wants inflation halved by the end of the year and so do I.

That will give us the platform for growth. Some of the other things we've done, such as with the Dame Angela McLean Review, looking at a growth duty on regulators, investment in AI and quantum and then providing the right regulatory framework and approach to those; all this is the underpinning of the new economy. We must make sure that we deliver the capital investment that we set out in a way that enables growth. We must make sure that we put investment into Metropolitan authorities to help drive growth outside of London.

These are all things that are critical for us to be in the right position as we face the electorate in the last quarter of next year. They will be asking, are we moving in the right direction? Does this Government have a grip on the biggest growth challenges? Are we seeing the restoration of normal service, if you like, when it comes to growth, rather than what we've dealt with recently - which has been a massive shock, followed by another massive shock, followed by an inflationary challenge that we haven't had for several decades? We need to make sure that the public are confident that we can answer these questions.

“ I don't want us to be judged only on the levels of debt or tax that we have at the moment, but I do want us to be judged on how responsive we've been to the needs of the economy

**Liz Truss was right, wasn't she, when she argued that growth is currently dangerously anaemic in this country? How can we fiscally, through policy, turbocharge it?**

Liz Truss' insight into growth was correct, but the way you deliver it is more important. Anyone can have the insight, but it's about how you do it. I respect Liz very much; we were contemporaries at university, and I never speak ill of a fellow Conservative, but what I do want to do is make sure that in those areas: of quantum, AI, advanced manufacturing, FinTech, crypto, the application of blockchain and DLT to financial markets - that we think about the enabling and facilitating the role that regulators can provide. When we look at what we did in the budget on MHRA [Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency] - these are the interventions that the government can make to enable growth.

Clearly, the workforce challenges and changes we have seen post-COVID have meant that people have changed their habits in terms of engaging with the workforce. So, we've brought in the childcare change, for example. But I don't deny that getting people into work and setting the context for a stable financial framework for investment is the challenge. The previous Prime Minister, Liz Truss, was right to do that, and we too need to assert the need for growth. But what we also need to do is recognise that government doesn't control everything, and what government, particularly Conservative Governments, should be about is enabling businesses to be confident in making investment decisions. We are not running the economy, we're setting the conditions for growth.

I'm nervous of situations where Conservative governments intervene too much in the market and I'm anxious that we should move to a position as quickly as we can where taxes are coming down. We can only do that when we also respect the primary rule, which is sound money.

Sound money has to govern everything and it's an uncomfortable truth for some of my colleagues. I would love to be able to advise the Chancellor that we're in a great position to make enormous tax cuts. A few of my colleagues are very keen to give me substantive politically-realistic options for cuts, but perhaps they shouldn't be. If we think about the challenges facing the NHS - broadly 15% less output than pre-COVID - and some of the other obligations around public services, we need to continue to make those investments.

**With the mini-budget and Brexit, do you think the Conservatives have lost their economic credibility?**

Our reputation has certainly been damaged by what happened in



>> October. I take no joy in that whatsoever. Everything I've done in the last seven-and-a-half months since I've been back in government has been to bring stability. To tell the story of what we are doing. Echoing the Chancellor's speech earlier this year in which he set out those interventions across the four Es: enterprise, education, employment, everywhere.

Yes, damage was done. But I don't want to linger on that. I want to think positively about how the Conservative Party can do what we've always done, which is to overcome challenges and get back on the front foot.

**Bright Blue has long called for a shift of the weight of taxation from income from work to income from assets. In fact, you could cut Income Tax or National Insurance quicker or deeper by doing this. Why not do that now?**

All tax changes are something that we have to look at as we approach our fiscal event [the Autumn Statement]. And this is where I think it's very difficult for people outside of the Treasury, 'without the dashboard' on public spending, without a clear idea of what the cost of debt is, without that evolving picture related to interest rates and market activities, to accept the fact that there can't be an ideological imperative running our tax strategy; we've got to balance it against what we need to cover in terms of servicing debt and paying for public services.

I would hope that when we look at what options we have, if and when the Chancellor deems that appropriate, we look at those that make the biggest impact on the economy and give as much relief to as many people as possible. If you polled most people, they find most taxes are unpopular, but it is necessary and we

won't get the investment that we need otherwise. We have seen record investment in our schools. We saw just a few weeks ago some excellent data on the reading skills of young pupils at schools in this country. And that requires ongoing investment - we can't have a stop-start funding approach to things that are actually key enablers of economic growth and opportunity.

“ Government doesn't control everything, and what government, particularly Conservative Governments, should be about is enabling businesses to be confident in making investment decisions

**Labour is trying hard to be seen as the party of business. What do you think is the most appropriate relationship between government and business?**

It's one of respectful collaboration, recognising that governments don't have all the answers. And business people are on the frontline, taking risks with their own capital and others' to provide employment, sponsor skills development and generate the revenues that sustain the economy.

When I was City Minister, I spent a lot of time on this. If you look through my transparency returns, you'll see I did numerous meetings, week in, week out, with people in that sector. I continue to do as much of that as I can in my current role. So I think a close collaborative relationship is sensible.

But I think the issue with the Opposition's engagement is that,

>> probably by definition, it's opportunistic. It seeks to garner the frustrations that people feel about the state of the world with a call for an alternative.

What I hope will happen over the coming months is that we have serious scrutiny of what the Opposition's alternative looks like. I wrote to the Shadow Chancellor just last week asking her to comment on the new additional £28 billion black hole that she has opened up in her prospectus for government. And I was interested to see just a few days later that the Shadow Cabinet had been warned not to make unfunded commitments.

Being in government means you cannot hide from the OBR [Office for Budget Responsibility]. You can't hide from the commentators. And whilst I respect the Shadow Chancellor's team, to be taken seriously by the electorate and by those who commentate leading up to an election, you can't just syphon off one tranche of public spending as not debt. It is debt - it has to be paid for.

As Economic Secretary, I was responsible for the debt management office - the debt management office have to issue gilts. And the coupon needs to be paid. It doesn't matter how you badge it, you can't hide from these realities.

“

Where we've got to now is that we've almost got a checklist of things that a business has to say and do in order to be deemed to be socially and ethically on the right side of the line

**Businesses are facing a much more politicised environment now - campaigning customers, more media scrutiny, high-profile scandals involving staff. How do you think businesses should navigate politics?**

Businesses' primary job is to generate high-quality products and services that consumers want.

I'm a little bit nervous of what businesses have become, or are increasingly becoming: actors in social policy or reflecting other societal developments. And, yes, on the one hand, they need to be tuned into the needs of their audience. But, in the last 13 years that I've been a Member of Parliament, this polarisation of views on social media sometimes leads to quite a short-term approach to dealing with some of these issues and businesses end up being

very concerned not to be on the wrong side of public sentiment.

In fact, I think the mainstream majority of this country want businesses to provide value for money and quality services and goods that they can rely on and probably want them to keep out of politics.

**Do you think maybe it comes off as a bit transparent at times?**

I worked for many years as a management consultant at Accenture. I remember when I was doing my MBA, about 20 years ago, the whole ESG [environmental, social and governance] agenda was coming to the fore.

And it is absolutely right - I grew up on a small business in Wiltshire, where my late father had a responsibility to his employees, to his customers and to society. This was all part of responsible active citizenship.

But I think where we've got to now is that we've almost got a checklist of things that a business has to say and do in order to be deemed to be socially and ethically on the right side of the line. I'm not sure about this. We've seen what can happen in recent months. Think of that US beer brand, where consumers reacted rather differently than was anticipated.

I think we need to make sure that businesses are free to do what they want and we, as a society, don't impose obligations on them from a sort of societal trend or fad that isn't really what the mainstream majority want.

**Some on the right say that we have too much woke capitalism, with big businesses cynically adopting ultra-progressive standpoints to attract young customers and staff. Do you see this as a problem, especially to the conservative worldview?**

I don't think it's a problem. I'm just bemused that this is where we are.

For me, what matters is what your customer wants. How are you going to deliver it? And do you have a brand to identify with? And I think we underestimate that the vast majority of people are interested in that more than they're interested in what their stance is on various topical, societal issues.

And I'm not the sort of politician who makes grand ideologically-driven statements to garner a headline. What I want is a strong



>> economy with capitalism flourishing, with people able to get on with their lives and be freely able to choose what goods and services they want.

I'm sort of agnostic about some of these matters, because they're often a matter of personal preference. But I'm uncomfortable, instinctively, to see big businesses appropriating the views of their customers to make a political point. If they want to get into politics, then stand for election.

“

The mainstream majority of this country want businesses to provide value for money and quality services and goods that they can rely on and probably want them to keep out of politics

**Do you think, as we have for example seen with NatCon recently, that there is a danger of Conservatives themselves being too vocal and demanding of what they think people should do?**

The Conservative family is a broad one. But as we get towards election, we need to exercise discipline and restraint in all parts of the Party, because we need to demonstrate unity of purpose. This is especially true as we continue to deal with some of the most difficult challenges of our time. I've got genuine, good friends across the whole of the Party. I've worked for William Hague, for Michael Howard, for David Cameron. I love the Conservative Party.

If you look over the elections that I've been involved with since 1997, we are at our best when we're united. And I'm convinced that the vast majority of my colleagues recognise that, but when you've been in power for 13 years, frustrations exist. If you go through what we've gone through over the last three years, you can understand why some people feel frustrated at times.

But that's true in all political parties. If you think about the range of views between Ken Clarke and Bill Cash - they're just as considerable as the range between Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner. But we've got to work through them in private and be united as we approach the election.

**Why is Britain uniquely a great place to do business?**

Well, we're very well respected globally as a place where we have a strong, reliable regulatory framework, rule of law and the English

language. We also have financial services in the City that provide a framework for investment, which is very strong. We have enormous strengths in terms of our people, innovation and high quality universities - in which we have three or four of the world's top ten universities. Those are centres of innovation and creativity. We are international hubs of leadership in the industry of the future. And we're also a tolerant open society that actually values diversity. Across the different regions of the UK there are different cultural traditions and different outlooks.

We're a coherent and, on the whole, a well-governed society that people value and enjoy. We have good relationships across the globe, especially with both the US and with the EU. And the trade deals that we've done over in the Pacific are also important. The work that the Prime Minister is doing, and did do as Chancellor at the OECD and G7 on numerous matters, is key. His latest work on AI demonstrates that we punch above our weight. Even though we might be a relatively small country geographically, our economic



>> impact and our leadership role is important. I think the Prime Minister carries that with both humility and authority. And this Government is there to follow that.

“

We are at our best when we're united and I'm convinced that the vast majority of my colleagues recognise that, but when you've been in power for 13 years, frustrations exist

**How do you think generative AI is changing and will change how businesses operate? Are you more of a pessimist - that AI will lead to mass redundancies - or an optimist - that it will make us more productive and skilled?**

I'm a realist. I'm optimistic about the opportunities, but I'm real about the fact that there will be challenges in our ecosystem.

The AI sector is estimated to contribute about 3.7 billion in GVA, gross value added, to the UK economy. It attracts to the UK some of the best talent in the world. A study a couple of years ago said that we were the second-most-popular destination for AI researchers.

I recently visited the US and went to San Francisco where I met a number of innovative companies and they were telling me that our

overall productivity should expect to rise by 25 to 35% due to AI.

But then there is the journey of getting there and what regulatory framework we adopt. Globally, I think the jury's out, but the Prime Minister is obviously leading the global conversation on that. Given our leadership, I'm optimistic it will be transformative.

If you think about how the high street has changed in the last 20 years. How banking and financial services, how we access our bank accounts, how that's changed just in the last 15 years, you're seeing that we've got another opportunity, another wave of change that AI will bring in and we need to harness it and use it for good.

The jobs that will potentially be taken away by AI will be replaced with different and perhaps better jobs, but human society requires us all to live together, to work together, to enjoy leisure time together, to eat and socialise together. And all of that means that you can't consume food and services through AI. AI can at most give us information and allow us to process things more efficiently. And that has to have a positive effect.

I'm more interested in the impact it has on the delivery of public services. The work it could do in health and social care and in education can be quite transformative.

**What would you tell young people is the better career path, business or politics?**

I visited the House of Commons when I was 11 with my late father.



HM Treasury

>> I met my MP, Sir Richard Needham who was a great influence and mentor to me. I was struck by the opportunity to influence national events as an MP, whilst also having the responsibility of representing 70,000 people in our national parliament. That gripped me aged 11.

Twenty-five years later, I became an MP myself. I love that dual role as a constituency MP in Salisbury in Wiltshire, where I grew up, as well as the duty to shape our national government at this crucial time.

My career in consulting was varied and interesting, but it didn't quite meet those objectives. I think it's horses for courses and I don't rule anything out in the future. However, politics has its difficult moments. It can be very intense. Media interest and scrutiny can be very intrusive and it's all-consuming.

But, at the end of the day, I feel very privileged to be a Member of Parliament. Probably, on balance, for me, this is my preference. Otherwise, I would have carried on trying to make more money for an oil major, which is what I was doing for some of the time when I was in consulting.

“ I recently visited the US and went to San Francisco where I met a number of innovative companies and they were telling me that our overall productivity should expect to rise by 25 to 35% due to AI

### Who is your intellectual inspiration for economic decision-making?

If you look back over the different chancellors, they all have different contexts. But I don't think you can fail to be impressed by what Nigel Lawson achieved in the 80s. He was somebody who, when he came out and backed Rishi last year, understood that sound money was all and that gives us the opportunity to build on the changes that he did to tax. So, to me, he's always been a strong, strong influence.

I've worked under five chancellors: Philip Hammond, Sajid Javid, Rishi Sunak and now Jeremy Hunt, and I was about 12 hours under Nadhim Zahawi. And they've all had a slightly different approach based around their personality. They were all very intelligent and worked very hard and it's been a privilege to work under all of them. But, when you look back, the perspective of time helps.

Nigel Lawson was clearly someone who had a pretty good overall record and, of course, he was Chancellor for rather longer than some of those I've just mentioned. I'm obviously the Chief Secretary now and I'm privileged to attend Cabinet and support Jeremy [Hunt] in every way I can.

### What should be the future of the centre-right in this country - should it be national or liberal conservatism?


The Conservative Party is the most effective when we align to the priorities of the mainstream majority. And I think we've gone through a period of significant change, post-2016. The other tenet of conservatism that I've always held to is that government should be quiet, unobtrusive and enable people to go about their lives in the way that they want; state should be there as a safety net, to help those who are vulnerable and, in some areas, to enable and to create the frameworks. Essentially, it should not dominate the life of the nation.

For me, the big difference between the two parties, and why I'm a Conservative and not a Labour Party politician, is because I'm optimistic about the role of the individual, when given the opportunity of a good education and a safe and stable society to fulfil their individual life goals and trajectory. We shouldn't be intruding and making value judgments about how people should live their lives.

However, I also recognise that labels are dangerous and difficult. I've always tried to avoid being labelled one way or the other. I have been uncomfortable with a narrative that emphasises the national identity of the UK. For me, that's always been part of who I am: Salisbury, Wiltshire, England, United Kingdom have always been my primary identifications, if you like.

We are part of the continent of Europe, we are part of a family of nations, have a very unusually close relationship with the US and are seen across the globe, including in Africa and Asia, as a typically well-respected country. We need to maintain that openness to collaboration. The evolution in our defence policy around AUKUS and so on has demonstrated the reach that we have.

We need to optimise those relationships in all directions and use the freedoms that we have to develop our economy and our relationships with those in Europe and with the US.

But we also got to have a bit of humility. We're not the largest economy in the world, but we do some things very well. And we need to work out how, amongst our allies, we can make that distinct contribution. 

# Parliamentary supporters

Our parliamentary supporters endorse Bright Blue and its aim of strengthening and advancing liberal conservatism. They do not necessarily agree with all the policies and opinions we advocate.

- Bim Afolami MP	- Andy Carter MP	- Nick Gibb MP	- Mark Jenkinson MP	Nicholson of Winterbourne	- Michael Tomlinson MP
- Nickie Aiken MP	- Lord Cavendish of Furness	- Peter Gibson MP	- Robert Jenrick MP	- Caroline Nokes MP	- Anne-Marie Trevelyan CBE MP
- Peter Aldous MP	- Alex Chalk MP	- Jo Gideon MP	- Fay Jones MP	- Mark Pawsey MP	- The Viscount Trenchard
- Lucy Allan MP	- Jo Churchill MP	- Lord Gilbert of Panteg	- Daniel Kawczynski MP	- John Penrose MP	- Laura Trott MBE MP
- Stuart Andrew MP	- Simon Clarke MP	- Baron Gold of Westcliff-on-Sea	- Lord Keen of Elie QC	- Chris Philp MP	- Tom Tugendhat MBE MP
- Edward Argar MP	- Chris Clarkson MP	- Maurice Golden MSP	- John Lamont MP	- Dr Dan Poulter MP	- Lord Vaizey of Shidcot
- Victoria Atkins MP	- Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP	- Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park	- Pauline Latham OBE MP	- Rebecca Pow MP	- Shailesh Vara MP
- Gareth Bacon MP	- Damian Collins MP	- Michael Gove MP	- Brandon Lewis MP	- Victoria Prentis MP	- Baroness Vere of Norbiton
- Harriett Baldwin MP	- Lord Cooper of Windrush	- Richard Graham MP	- Ian Levy MP	- Mark Pritchard MP	- Christian Wakeford MP
- Shaun Bailey MP	- The Lord Cormack	- James Gray MP	- The Lord Livingston of Parkhead	- Will Quince MP	- Robin Walker MP
- Siobhan Baillie MP	- Robert Courts MP	- Chris Grayling MP	- The Earl of Lindsay	- Dominic Raab MP	- Matt Warman MP
- Lord Balfe of Dulwich	- Stephen Crabb MP	- Chris Green MP	- Dean Lockhart MSP	- Baron Renfrew of Kaimsthorn	- Baroness Warsi
- Jeremy Balfour MSP	- James Daly MP	- Chris Green MP	- Chris Loder MP	- Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg MP	- Giles Watling MP
- Simon Baynes MP	- David TC Davies MP	- Damian Green MP	- Mark Logan MP	- Angela Richardson MP	- Sue Webber MSP
- Aaron Bell MP	- Gareth Davies MP	- Dr Sandesh Gulhane MSP	- Julia Lopez MP	- The Lord Risby	- Annie Wells MSP
- Sir Jake Berry MP	- Dr James Davies MP	- Robert Halfon MP	- Jonathan Lord MP	- Baron Robathan of Poultney	- Tess White MSP
- Saqib Bhatti MBE MP	- Lord Deben	- Luke Hall MP	- Tim Loughton MP	- Andrew Rosindell MP	- Helen Whately MP
- Lord Black of Brentwood	- Dame Caroline Dinenage MP	- Rachael Hamilton MSP	- Lord Lucas	- Baron Sassoon of Ashley Park	- Brian Whittle MSP
- Bob Blackman MP	- Michelle Donelan MP	- Stephen Hammond MP	- Douglas Lumsden MSP	- Selaine Saxby MP	- John Whittingdale OBE MP
- Lord Blencathra	- Jonathan Djanogly MP	- Matthew Hancock MP	- Craig Mackinlay MP	- Lord Sharma MP	- Lord Willetts
- Crispin Blunt MP	- Flick Drummond MP	- Lord Hannan	- Rachel MacLean MP	- Horsham	- Mike Wood MP
- Sir Peter Bottomley MP	- Philip Dunne MP	- Simon Hart MP	- Alan Mak MP	- Jerome Mayhew MP	- Nadhim Zahawi MP
- Andrew Bowie MP	- Ruth Edwards MP	- Sir Oliver Heald MP	- Scott Mann MP	- Paul Maynard MP	
- Sir Graham Brady MP	- Tobias Ellwood MP	- James Heapey MP	- Lord Maude of	- Roz McCall MSP	
- Suella Braverman MP	- George Eustice MP	- Damian Hinds MP	- Horsham	- Stephen McPartland MP	
- Jack Brereton MP	- Nigel Evans MP	- Simon Hoare MP	- Jerome Mayhew MP	- David Melding AM	
- Miles Briggs MSP	- Ben Everitt MP	- Baroness Hodgson of Abinger	- Paul Maynard MP	- Johnny Mercer MP	
- Steve Brine MP	- Michael Fabricant MP	- Baron Hodgson of Astley Abbotts	- Stephen McPartland MP	- Stephen Metcalfe MP	
- Sara Britcliffe MP	- Laura Farris MP	- Richard Holden MP	- Mark Menzies MP	- Maria Miller MP	
- Anthony Browne MP	- Simon Fell MP	- Kevin Hollinrake MP	- David Melding AM	- Andrew Mitchell MP	
- Fiona Bruce MP	- Lord Finkelstein OBE of Pinner	- Philip Hollobone MP	- Johnny Mercer MP	- Gagan Mohindra MP	
- Sir Robert Buckland MP	- Katherine Fletcher MP	- Paul Holmes MP	- Stephen Metcalfe MP	- Robbie Moore MP	
- David Duguid MP	- Vicky Ford MP	- Lord Holmes of Richmond	- Maria Miller MP	- Baroness Morgan of Cotes	
- Alexander Burnett MSP	- Murdoch Fraser MSP	- John Howell MP	- Andrew Mitchell MP	- Penny Mordaunt MP	
- Conor Burns MP	- Lucy Frazer QC MP	- Nigel Huddleston MP	- Gagan Mohindra MP	- Oliver Mundell MSP	
- Rob Butler MP	- George Freeman MP	- Jeremy Hunt MP	- Robbie Moore MP	- The Baroness	
- Alun Cairns MP	- Mike Freer MP	- Alister Jack MP	- Baroness Morgan of Cotes		
- Donald Cameron MSP	- Mark Garnier MP	- Sajid Javid MP	- Penny Mordaunt MP		
- Miriam Cates MP	- Nusrat Ghani MP		- Oliver Mundell MSP		
- Jackson Carlaw MSP	- John Glen MP		- The Baroness		
- Finlay Carson MSP					

# Our seven research visions

We defend and improve liberal society. Our primary role is to create and vet government policy.

Our seven new visions for an even better Britain:

**1** **Bountiful economy**  
*enriching, inventive, green, fair*

**2** **Clean environment**  
*abundant, sustainable, beautiful*

**3** **Connected communities**  
*welcoming, trusting, vibrant, evocative*

**4** **Empowering government**  
*nurturing, innovative, exemplary*

**5** **Good lives**  
*self-authored, sociable, enjoyable, enlightening*

**6** **Just institutions**  
*inclusive, transparent, forgiving, meritocratic*

**7** **Rewarding work**  
*enhancing, purposeful, secure, inspiring*



## Recent report

### Building up: The future of social security

*Anvar Sarygulov and Phoebe Arslanagic-Wakefield*

The UK's social security system has seen much change since its inception in the early twentieth century, having been repeatedly expanded and simplified, including with the introduction of Universal Credit. The COVID-19 pandemic and the rising cost of living has put significant strain on the finances of low-income households, exposing flaws with this system.

This report examines the adequacy, accessibility and fairness of the UK's social security system for working-age adults in low-income households before and during the pandemic, before proposing three original policy recommendations to strengthen the social security system for working age adults.

# Captain of industry?

**Stephen Kinnock MP** laments the lack of a UK industrial strategy



Recently, Make UK called on the Government to stop flip-flopping on industrial strategy and instead place British manufacturing at the heart of the plan to tackle regional inequality and Britain's competitiveness.

"A lack of a proper, planned, industrial strategy is the UK's achilles heel," said Stephen Phipson, Make UK's CEO. "Every other major economy, from Germany, to China, to the US, has a long-term national manufacturing plan, underlying the importance of an industrial base to the success of its wider economy."

**“ Decarbonisation must not mean deindustrialisation, but the cost of doing nothing will be greater to workers and business owners alike**

His comments could not be more timely. After witnessing a decade of China enhancing its economic and political influence by exploiting the disunity and naivety of Western politicians, many of whom mistakenly expected the country to integrate with the liberal world order, Britain is now faced with the new reality of Joe Biden's £292 billion Inflation Reduction Act.

Biden's Act is a response steeped in the realpolitik that we are no longer in the kumbaya world of the 1990s. Most national governments now understand that a strong domestic manufacturing base is absolutely essential to building the resilience and sovereign independence that a country requires to survive in this new age of authoritarianism. They know that manufacturing also provides an opportunity to deliver sustainable growth, good jobs and higher living standards in the face of

the green transition.

Alarming for the people of Britain, Rishi Sunak is just about the only leader of any Western country who is failing to understand the importance of this quest for growth and resilience. An industrial strategy is nowhere to be seen. The Prime Minister and his Chancellor seem trapped in a bygone era, blind to the reality of the world around them, with Sunak openly speaking out against the idea of subsidising British industry, having already scrubbed the words 'industrial strategy' out of the Business department.

Sunak and Hunt might tell themselves that they are walking a narrowing diplomatic tightrope as we enter the new world of major player competition. Indeed, on deeper introspection, the pair's indication that they are ideologically unwilling to respond to the actions of China, the US and the EU by investing and subsidising where necessary represents a grave threat to the economic future of

dozens of British industries and our country's broader economic resilience and independence.

This is because China's state-backed companies, Biden's new Act and the imminent EU equivalent are likely to Hoover up huge swathes of green investment and lead to the offshoring of green growth, good jobs and our economic security. Yet Britain's leadership is ideologically opposed to doing anything about it.

The Labour Party has, however, spent the last two years developing its plans to attract green investment and deliver the jobs that every region of the UK so desperately needs.

Rachel Reeves has been absolutely clear that Labour will help British manufacturers of all sizes to make, buy and sell more in Britain. This will be done through commitments to change procurement rules, reforming business rates and delivering a



>> National Wealth Fund to invest in projects nationwide. In her recent speech to the Peterson Institute in Washington DC, she spelt out in the clearest terms yet that industrial strategy will be at the heart of her plans for green growth and resilience.

'Securonomics,' as Labour's Shadow Chancellor calls it, is based on her view that: "Globalisation as we know it is dead... We must care about where things are made and who owns them. [We need] a more active state, one that is willing to invest in building the capacity of the industries that will determine the nation's success tomorrow."

At the heart of the Labour Party's mission to boost British industry sits our Green Prosperity Plan and the Industrial Strategy set out last year by shadow Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds.


A core pillar of that strategy is the quest for resilience, and this is illustrated by the

commitment to a three billion pound Steel Renewal Fund.

Three billion pounds might feel like a bold commitment to support the transition to green steelmaking, but consider this: the Canadian, Spanish and German steelmakers are investing the equivalent of up to a billion pounds to decarbonise single plants. Their governments understand that they are in a global race, with steel demand rising and the future security of their nations depending on their ability to decarbonise.

Of course, the transition should happen as a partnership between government, unions and employers to ensure that workers are developing the skills they need for the economy of tomorrow. Decarbonisation must not mean deindustrialisation, but the cost of doing nothing will be greater to workers and business owners alike.

Yet the Conservative Government appears completely uninterested in investing the level of funding required to keep British steel competitive. Electricity prices for British steelmakers remain between 60% and 80% higher than the costs faced by firms in other leading European nations, while the Government's post-Brexit procurement strategy has failed to materialise, with not a single tonne of British steel being used in our wind farms.

We need action and we need it now. Britain needs its steel, and currently one thing is abundantly clear; Labour is the only party on the pitch when it comes to promising a serious industrial strategy. 

**Stephen Kinnock MP** is the Shadow Minister for Immigration and Labour MP for Aberavon, home of Port Talbot Steelworks

## Low tax, high reward?

The market should lead the way on levelling up, writes **Sir John Redwood MP**



Levelling up is a magnificent cause. But to achieve it, it is crucial that we learn from countries around the world that have grown their way out of hardship and low incomes. And we can also heed the warning from those countries that are busily levelling down, despite having the best of intentions.

We can see this pattern in Democrat- and Republican-led states in the United States. In each case, the governments that welcome the private sector create a good background for self-employment, small business and large corporations. Their responsible public spending lifts millions out of low incomes and worklessness. But in the states led by well-intentioned socialists who want to expand the state, provide more subsidies for the poor and

tax the rich, they end up driving more people into poverty.

Another good example is Venezuela. The country is endowed with the largest oil reserves of any country in the world, including Saudi Arabia. But successive rounds of penal taxation, stringent regulation and nationalisation have killed the golden goose of a once successful industry.

Venezuela struggles to produce one tenth of the Saudi oil output. It finds it difficult to get its wells working and its refineries repaired. It lacks the foreign currency to afford all the parts and expertise it needs from abroad to get its energy sector working again. It has lost many of its most-able and well-qualified people; they can no longer make a living

there and are seen as candidates for penal taxation, should they find a way to earn more. The supermarket shelves are often half empty and customers who do have sufficient money to buy things have to scout around to find something to buy. Inflation has taken off to very high levels, currently sitting at around 400%. Central interest rates are at 57%. Venezuela is socialism in action. All rules, high taxes, subsidies and government control.

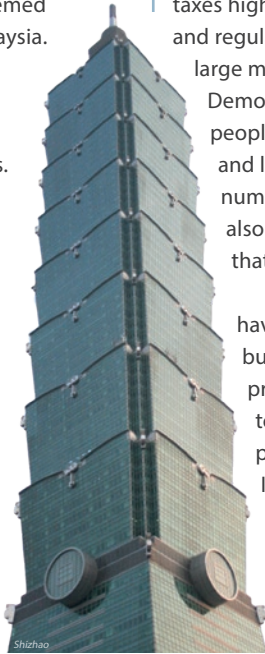
On the other hand, today's success stories include Singapore and Taiwan. These Asian dynamos keep tax rates low, attract substantial foreign capital and

>> overseas business, nurture local talent and attract people from around the world to visit, trade and learn from their achievements.

Singapore was thought too small to be independent and was deemed unwise to separate from Malaysia. After a difficult beginning, the state has shown that it is possible to be small, independent and prosperous.

Taiwan, despite the difficulties from her huge neighbour - the People's Republic of China - has delivered far higher incomes per head and living standards than the communist mainland.

In the USA today, a more moderate version of the Venezuela versus Singapore policy experiment sees major migratory flows from California to Texas and from New York to Florida.



Florida and Texas, two Republican states, keep state taxes low, welcome new business and offer a light touch regulatory environment to make prosperity possible. New York and California keep taxes high, run bigger state budgets and regulate more intrusively. There are large movements of people from the Democrat to the Republican states, as people seek better homes and jobs and lower taxes. They meet there large numbers of migrants from abroad, also attracted to the opportunities that Texas and Florida create.

To level up, the state needs to have low rates of tax on income and business. It needs to offer good properties and land to build on to attract richer people who are prepared to invest in the area. It should help to find industrial and commercial space and grant development permission to those who want to build a business. It needs to offer good communications and utilities,

so businesses are able to get the raw materials in and the finished goods out.

“ You do not make an area rich by nationalising the main facilities and by taxing business and entrepreneurs away

Businesses require plenty of power, broadband and water for their activities. They also need to be able to recruit willing employees to train and promote as they grow. You do not make an area rich by nationalising the main facilities and by taxing business and entrepreneurs away. Nor does it help to lay down what you can and cannot do in such detail that people would rather live and work somewhere with more liberty. ”

**Sir John Redwood MP** is the Conservative Member of Parliament for Wokingham and a former Secretary of State for Wales

## Skills to pay the bills?

**Kate Fairhurst** lays out what we can do to improve the UK's skills shortage



It is a point trailed many times before that a highly skilled population is a prerequisite for economic growth. Whilst not a unique point, it is an important one, particularly at a time when the UK is craving a good news growth story amidst a continuing challenging economic picture.

Critical to local economic growth is the capability of an area's working population. With skilled workers high in demand, competition is fierce. In the period from March to May 2023, vacancy numbers in the UK sat at just over one million. It was the 11th consecutive period of fall after several

years of post-pandemic impact.

Skills and labour shortages have exacerbated this problem. The Federation of Small Businesses found last year that 80% of small firms faced difficulty recruiting applicants with suitable skills in the previous 12 months and COVID-19 also caused high levels of economic inactivity – something HM Treasury continues to grapple with today.

It can be tempting to keep the debate on skills in a more cynical place, focusing on the negatives as to why this is such a problem for us here in the UK. Of course, we

need to understand and diagnose the problems, which include a historic focus on academic rather than technical and vocational routes, the impacts of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic and a rapidly changing world that is fast creating the need for new skill sets.

However, with challenge also comes opportunity. Our net zero ambitions are already creating a whole host of new



>> future skills needs and the pandemic has introduced new ways of working and operating for many businesses which did not seem possible three years ago.

As places look to build their plans to drive economic growth, skills should be at the heart of any strategy. A good way for local areas to do this is by identifying the key growth sectors from which a compelling skills offer can be constructed, not to mention the obvious opportunity to create exciting propositions for potential inward investors too.

From agritech in North Yorkshire to the creative industries in Coventry, every local place has its own story to tell.

Local areas know their skills needs better than anyone. Whilst




national initiatives to boost skills have their place, closer collaboration between local partners could yield transformative results. With local authorities acting as a natural convener, businesses can report their skills-related needs, shortages and surpluses, with nearby further and higher education institutions then responding accordingly. This happens well in some parts of the country and less well in others.

A greater use of local skills not only benefits businesses, but it also allows local places to move away from a 'brain drain,' where people skill up locally and then leave, even though many would love the opportunity to live and work in their hometowns. Local places do not need to embark on this journey alone. There is considerable enthusiasm within the private sector to join forces with partners to regenerate and grow local areas, and getting the skills piece right will be a fundamental part of that.

Henham Strategy was recently commissioned by the North Essex

Economic Board, consisting of six North Essex district authorities and the Essex County Council, to write a refreshed Economic Strategy and Delivery Plan. As part of that project, we worked with CB Heating, an air source heat pump installer based in Clacton-on-Sea, who have a successful partnership with EDF to roll out more products across the country and establish a Heat Pump Installers Network Academy, which has the capacity to train up to 4,000 new installers. For both parties, the collaboration is a win-win, and North Essex now benefits from a strong skills pipeline for its renewable energy regeneration growth sector.

The policy debate around skills does not need to be a bleak one. Closer and more open collaboration between key partners at a local level has the potential to paint a very different, and more optimistic, picture - one that sets out an exciting vision of the future for us all. 

**Kate Fairhurst** is a Director at Henham Strategy and was previously Head of Office at the London Assembly

## A lust for power

To boost British industry, we need to start with cheaper energy, argues **Ben Hopkinson**



**B**ritish Steel's Scunthorpe plant is losing one million pounds a day. Steep energy prices continue to put this plant, like many others, further into the financial red. This not only puts 1,700 of the worker's jobs at risk, but also puts UK manufacturing companies which rely on its steel in an uncertain position.

Therefore, the Energy Security and Net Zero Secretary, Grant Shapps, and the Levelling Up Secretary, Michael Gove, have called for a £300 million subsidy for British Steel, arguing that the company "does not

have a viable business without government support." This may keep the plant open temporarily, but it is costly and fails to solve the long-term problem - high energy prices.

High energy prices do not just harm existing industries; they stop industries of the future from opening in Britain too. If Britain wants to become an AI superpower, it will need a cheap supply of power. Otherwise, it will not be economically viable to run the large processing centres needed to train the complex AI models. Data centres, which are necessary to do anything

online, could use more than a quarter of Britain's energy by 2029. When multinational companies decide where to build new plants, energy costs are a key consideration. In short, the high energy prices plaguing the UK will deter foreign investment and act as a barrier to future growth.

While Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to a 500% spike in wholesale electricity prices,



>> high energy prices were already holding back the British industry long before the conflict. Out of 230 countries and territories, the UK was placed 190th in a ranking of energy prices in 2021. These high prices push up costs for consumers and erode profitability for industry.

To give British industry the support it needs, it is essential to boost domestic power production. New renewable projects already have lower lifetime energy costs of £44 to £57 per megawatt hour compared to gas' £85, and are insulated from commodity price spikes. Private investment into new renewable and nuclear small modular reactors (SMRs) is also ready to go, but the planning system is holding Britain back.

Building new onshore wind, one of the cheapest forms of energy, is effectively banned in England due to planning restrictions. Just one objection to an onshore wind farm can stop an entire project being built. Consequently, England has built just two onshore wind turbines in the last three years. The easiest way to rectify this is to change how onshore wind is approved and allow schemes to go through the standard local planning system with the opportunity to hold a referendum if enough local residents object to the scheme.

The planning system also slows down

offshore wind and solar power, which offer cheaper power for Britain's industries. The UK is already the second-largest offshore wind market in the world. However, meeting the Government's ambition to increase offshore wind capacity from 13.9 to 50 gigawatts by 2030 will be challenging. An offshore wind project currently takes up to 12 years to complete, with significant time spent on environmental impact assessments, consultations and development consent orders. Construction takes just two years typically. A recent wind farm development, Hornsea 3, was slowed down by the need to complete a more than 10,000 page long environmental assessment.

To get more offshore wind farms up and running quickly, the Government should radically simplify the planning process for key national infrastructure and follow Spain's lead in waiving environmental assessments in areas with low or moderate environmental significance unless it is specifically requested by a public body.

The Government should also give industry the right to install rooftop solar panels on factories that are outside conservation areas, which would avoid the onerous requirement to get planning permission for installations greater than one

megawatt.

Besides renewables, the Government should also focus on constructing new SMRs, which would reduce the time and cost of building nuclear power sources. Britain was the first country to build a full-scale commercial nuclear power station, but it has not completed a new station in 27 years. SMRs provide a solution by offering the opportunity to simultaneously build several prefabricated reactors in a factory rather than expensive, customised one-off projects. This could grow a new British industry; 80% of the components by value used by Rolls-Royce SMR will come from Britain. These are then shipped to sites that can be smaller than traditional nuclear stations. But this economy of scale will be lost if SMRs are forced to navigate the same complex planning process as full-scale nuclear projects. Enabling SMRs to be easily built on existing nuclear sites or former coal power stations sites would be a good start.

**“ Britain was the first country to build a full-scale commercial nuclear power station, but it has not completed a new station in 27 years**

If we want to save British industry, we must start with the basics. Reforming our planning system to facilitate more renewable and nuclear power would lower energy prices. Cheaper, domestic power could provide energy security that would underpin future investment and avert the risk of geopolitical instability interrupting Britain's energy supply. As public finances come under further pressure, fixing the planning system would unlock billions of pounds in private investment which would lower energy bills for British manufacturing and help make UK industry more competitive.

**Ben Hopkinson** is a Policy Researcher at Britain Remade



**I S B A**

# **Championing an advertising environment that can be trusted by politicians and the public**

**The Incorporated Society of British Advertisers (ISBA) is the trade association representing brand advertisers in the UK.**

We empower our members to understand their industry and shape its future by bringing them together as a powerful community advocating for reform. We speak with one voice in favour of positive change for our society and economy.

Right now we're working on a range of issues – from food & drink advertising to online safety, and from the future of AI regulation to how our industry meets net zero.

Get in touch with us to find out more.

✉ [publicaffairs@isba.org.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@isba.org.uk)

🌐 [isba.org.uk](http://isba.org.uk)

**in** ISBA

🐦 @isbasays

One  
Voice

# Tech totalitarianism?

**James Ball** critiques the Government's war with big tech



There is no doubt whatsoever that big tech must be regulated. US legislators say it; EU authorities agree; the UK body politic concurs. Indeed, big tech itself agrees that there must be some form of regulation for the internet, as it continues to increase its presence in our lives. Even in our divided world, on this, there is consensus.

Sadly for all concerned, that is just about as far as the consensus goes. There were various so-called 'easy wins' when it comes to online spaces, but all of these were reached years ago.

Companies should have liability for customer data being lost or stolen due to negligence – sorted. Tech should make significant efforts to keep child abuse imagery off their services – a perpetual struggle, but one in which tens of thousands of images a day are removed. Wherever they are based, tech should remove speech that does not comply with local law – also, long ago, sorted.

This is most notable when looking for compliance with Germany's understandably strict laws against speech denying the Holocaust. Social networks now take down content that falls foul of this law, but is legal speech in other countries, thereby restricting it solely in Germany.

Big tech has made it clear they will comply with democratic laws on speech. They say



that if you want particular content not to exist, simply make it illegal – otherwise, leave the limits of legal speech up to us as individual services.

Some services, like Facebook, will not let so much as an exposed female nipple be on show – even if breastfeeding. Others, such as X (previously Twitter), are happy to host hardcore pornography.

“ Kids can easily tick a box saying that they are older than they actually are and generally are excellent at finding things that they should not

Each makes a choice according to what its users and advertisers are willing to accept, and acts accordingly.

But the UK's approach in the Online Safety Bill would have taken that much further. The Bill created a new category of 'legal but harmful' content which social networks would need to demonstrate they had plans to tackle without outright banning it.

With absolutely swingeing fines at stake, such a policy would clearly result in most networks zealously over-censuring content, given the costs of falling foul of the law are so much greater than the benefits of supporting

an open internet.

Such was the backlash from the tech sector that the Government tried to reframe the 'legal but harmful' restrictions as content likely to be accessed by children – on the face of it, a much more reasonable middle ground.

This was essential, as the Home Office had used children's charities to front much of the legislation and convinced them it was necessary to keep children safe online. In classic Home Office fashion, it set a trap and then immediately fell in it: pass the measure, and big tech withdraws jobs and activity from the UK; do not pass it and face a huge public backlash from charities that are largely above reproach.

The compromise does not work, of course. Almost every service online is likely to be accessed by children, generally defined as a person under 13. Kids can easily tick a box saying that they are older than they actually are and generally are excellent at finding things that they should not.

As a result, the only way to really exclude children is to introduce stringent age verification checks, which rely on some form of real-world ID, akin to those on gambling websites.

That has put the Government in direct conflict



>> with Wikipedia, the worthy not-for-profit encyclopaedia cribbed by children across the world for their homework assignments.

Wikipedia, not willing to introduce an age filter and unable to comprehensively moderate its site, has said that, if these measures were to pass, it would withdraw from the UK.

If any of this was easy, then it would have been done and dusted long ago. But there is a fundamental problem at the core of the rules: they do not bring big tech to heel. Instead, they merely introduce new restrictions on the ability of private citizens to speak out online.

It is approaching ridiculous if Facebook

can be punished for allowing on its site comments that someone could otherwise make in a public space without sanction. The result is not a restriction on Facebook, but rather on the person making the comments.

In general, big tech does not adequately moderate its content, nor does it contribute enough in tax to outweigh the societal harms of its products. The huge profit margins of the tech giants, especially in their online advertising divisions, is telling of a surplus that is causing issues.

Good legislation might look at trying to levy them in proportion to the harmful content on their platforms, with a sound

legal definition of such content, or else to require minimum moderation ratios and support times for large sites. But it should not try to outsource the limits of speech to cautious tech compliance companies, which is what the current Bill proposes.

When we do not like what we see online, it is rarely big tech's fault. We must ensure that when we are trying to regulate business, we do not instead merely regulate each other. [b](#)

**James Ball** is a British journalist and author who has worked for *The Grocer*, *The Guardian*, WikiLeaks, BuzzFeed, *The New European* and *The Washington Post*

## JobsGPT?

AI should be a tool, not a threat to jobs, argues **Jeegar Kakkad**

Every new technological revolution brings with it the same existential question about the future of work: is a robot going to take my job? In the past, it was the relatively routine work in agriculture, manufacturing and the service sector that got replaced by physical machines, robots and computers.

But today, well-paid roles in finance, tech and publishing are most at risk of disruption, and not from physical machines, but digital ones: artificial and remote intelligence.

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities are now exponential, and it is not just their pace that we need to be aware of, but also the breadth of their application.

Many of these developments are to be welcomed. They have the potential to make the world of work more productive. Teachers are using AI to create work plans and personalise learning, lawyers are piloting it to automate and enhance contract analysis, due diligence and

regulatory compliance and developers are using it to auto-generate new software code.

But there are concerns too. Millions of professional service jobs could be at risk of automation. GPT4 can learn to trick humans, making online fraud and harassment easier and more widespread, autonomous AI bots can be used to undermine national security, and this is all before we get to the potential for super-intelligent, God-like AI that poses catastrophic risks for humanity.

“ The UK’s high-productivity services sector could be threatened by AI, with the potential to push down the global cost of these services

Fifty years ago, the development of the first silicon microchips transformed computing power and ultimately kickstarted the ICT revolution, leading to

rapid deindustrialisation through the 1970s and 1980s. While we were quick to embrace the productivity power of new technologies, we did not do enough to help individuals and their communities adapt to the new realities - that meant manual and clerical jobs were automated or offshored overnight.

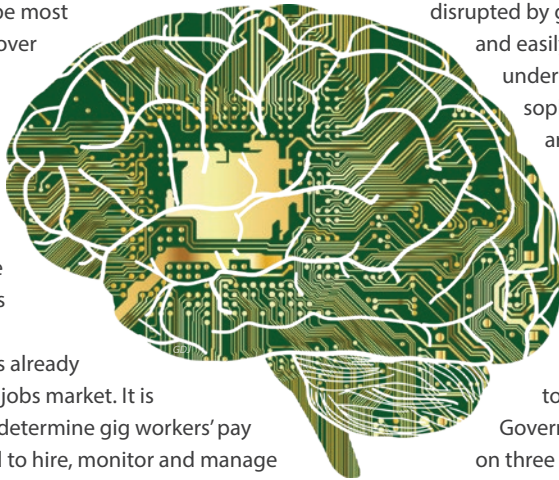
Half a century on, recent developments in AI suggest this wave of technology may be different, as AI systems are capable of automating the non-routine tasks of white-collar workers. The UK’s high-productivity services sector could be threatened by AI, with the potential to push down the global cost of these services by making it easier and quicker to provide them by competitors across the world. But, this time, we have the chance to learn from our past mistakes.

Goldman Sachs recently forecast that



>> around 24 million jobs in the UK will be exposed to automation, and that 25% of work tasks could be automated with existing AI technology. Other studies suggest jobs requiring a bachelor's degree could be most affected, with over 30% of them expected to have at least 50% of their tasks exposed to large language models such as GPT4.

Indeed, AI is already disrupting the jobs market. It is being used to determine gig workers' pay and hours, and to hire, monitor and manage office workers. BT and IBM are among the companies that have announced that tens of thousands of employee roles will be replaced by AI, with BT planning to replace 10,000 roles and IBM planning to



replace 7,800. Examples of highly exposed jobs include information services, finance, publishing and telecommunications. We are highly dependent on services and creative exports — areas already being disrupted by generative AI and easily automatable under the even more sophisticated artificial general intelligence (AGI). To ensure AI is a tool to support workers and not a threat to their jobs, the Government must focus on three areas.

First, it must produce regular reports – potentially powered by AI – forecasting the expected impact of AI on the domestic and global jobs market.

Second, an AI training fund is needed to

incentivise business and support people to learn to use AI as a productivity tool in their daily jobs or help them retrain for new roles. This training should be delivered by AI-enabled personalised learning and a digital learner ID that links formal and informal qualifications.

Third, the Government ought to introduce a new era of digital workers' rights that enable businesses and workers to use tech to support their wellbeing and productivity.

It is easy to dismiss new tech as a passing fad: web3, NFTs and crypto each were the future once. However, AI has the potential to be radically different, affecting everything, everywhere, all at once. The revolution is happening to our economy, to our jobs and to our politics, whether we are prepared for it or not. We can benefit from it, but only if we act with intent. [🔗](#)

**Jeegar Kakkad** is the Director of Future of Britain Policy at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change

## Charitable foundations

**Sarah Vibert** thinks charities can play a leading role in economic growth

The last few years have been undeniably challenging for the country and the world, with a pandemic, a major land war in Europe and an economic crisis. For charities, it has also been a time of challenge, but it has also demonstrated the importance of voluntary action.

When the pandemic hit, charities kept delivering services, they provided support to both Afghan and Ukrainian refugees and helped address the fallout of global instability, often having to adapt quickly and innovate to find a new way of doing things.

Alongside this, many were worrying about their own futures – particularly those reliant on event fundraising and trading activity. The cancellation of the London Marathon alone represented an estimated £70 million loss to the sector, whilst the Charity Retail Association estimated that charity shops lost over £285 million in sales over COVID-19.

Arguably the biggest challenge of all has been adapting to soaring inflation, leaving many charities with spiralling costs at a time when they are also helping more people in financial crises. The adaptability and resilience that charities have shown

through-out has been nothing short of remarkable.

Indeed, charities have had some help. The generosity of the British public has remained steadfast throughout. However, rather worryingly, the Charities Aid Foundation's UK Giving Report from this year revealed that a quarter of people had changed their giving activity or were considering doing so in response to the cost-of-living crisis. Even where people have been able to continue to give the



>> same rates, they will have seen the value of that donation significantly eroded by high inflation.

Government has also been supportive, providing a £750 million package for the sector in response to the pandemic, while charities benefited from many of the wider measures to support business; particularly the furlough scheme. And it has also responded to the financial challenges facing charities, with the Energy Bill Relief Scheme helping non-domestic energy users, including charities, and a £100 million scheme announced in the 2023 Spring Budget to support organisations facing additional demand because of inflationary pressures.

“ A quarter of people had changed their giving activity or were considering doing so in response to the cost-of-living crisis

This level of support is very welcome, but it should make us think about why this sort of support exists. Ultimately, both during the pandemic and over the last year, the Government has been prepared to invest money in charities because it knows it will get a good return. Voluntary organisations are committed to delivering the maximum possible impact even in the most trying of times.

But while people are only too aware of

how charities have stepped up in times of crisis, there remains a lack of understanding of the crucial role they play, underpinning social bonds and promoting opportunity.

When we talk to politicians, they may know that a charity is supporting their local community, but they do not always make the link to the way charities support both the local and national economy.

We can quantify some of the direct contributions that charities make to the economy – the former Head of the Levelling Up Taskforce and Founder of Pro Bono Economics, Andy Haldane, estimated that the sector’s contribution to social value is as much as £200 billion per year. Charities are also a significant employer, providing jobs for nearly a million people in the UK.


And when you look beyond those headline numbers, there are many broader ways that the sector plays a crucial role in supporting the economy and driving growth: from making communities better places to live to directly supporting unemployed people into work. Indeed, the Levelling Up White Paper recognised the necessity of social capital alongside more conventional levers for growth, but the Government still has much to do to maximise the potential of the sector in delivering economic growth and tackling regional inequality.

The importance of the voluntary sector can perhaps be most clearly recognised in its absence. Research by the Local Trust and Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion

(OCSI) identified that deprived areas that lack places to meet, are missing an active and engaged community and have poor connectivity to the wider community - all services provided by charities - also have higher rates of unemployment, ill health and child poverty than similarly deprived areas.

“ The UK looks like a better investment when we have communities that make the most of our talent and entrepreneurialism

Charities, of course, are not the only answer. We need businesses to create jobs, innovate and drive investment. But the UK looks like a better investment when we have communities that make the most of our talent and entrepreneurialism, that help people to enter or re-enter the labour market and that make sure all our communities are good places to thrive as a family.

The Government has already shown that it values the work of charities when we are dealing with immediate crises, but a stronger partnership between government and the voluntary sector feels essential to achieving long-term sustainable growth. 

**Sarah Vibert** is the Chief Executive Officer of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations

## Subscribe to our YouTube channel



Ensure you don't miss out on any of our events by subscribing to Bright Blue's YouTube channel. You can watch livestreams and recordings of all of our public panels, conferences, keynote speeches, as well as catch up on our latest media appearances.

Subscribe now at: [youtube.com/c/BrightBlueThinkTank](https://youtube.com/c/BrightBlueThinkTank)

# Why I'm a Bright Blue MP

**John Penrose MP** shares his vision for creative thinking within the Conservative Party



When the political left talks about the Conservative Party, they think of us as a movement that resists the new, maintaining the status quo. But I see the opposite: the Conservative Party is at its best when it is a potent force for change. Whether it is the Thatcher Government's supply-side reforms that transformed Britain from the sick man of Europe into a high-growth powerhouse or the social reforms of same-sex marriage and a generation of the most diverse Cabinet Ministers the country has ever seen, we deliver economic reform and social modernisation in spades.

In my case, the spark that lit the fire was when recently-arrived Prime Minister John Major said he wanted a classless society. It was a revolutionary idea – the complete opposite of the left-wing caricature – and I joined the Party the next week. But it was not that unusual; lots of other Conservative Party leaders have been agitators for change too, from Theresa May's famous 'Burning Injustices' speech on the steps of Downing Street on the day she became Prime Minister to Boris Johnson's 'Get Brexit Done' and 'Levelling Up.'

“ We are in the vanguard of that movement that has a determination never to let that hope of a better society fade away

I am a Bright Blue MP because we are in the vanguard of that movement that has a determination never to let that hope of a better society fade away. Post-Brexit, post-COVID and post-energy crisis, Britain has many difficult choices to make, but I believe we can and should be a fairer and happier

society that wastes less of our human talent, and where the old political battles of class, inequality and jealousy have become quaint historical curiosities.

But there is a lot left to do. Much of the social and economic progress achieved in the twentieth century has slowed down in the twenty-first. Healthy life expectancy has stopped rising and poorer families live much shorter lives than rich ones. Too many unskilled workers have uncertain earnings, insecure housing and less-supportive neighbourhoods. Digitisation and artificial intelligence will make most of our lives far better tomorrow than they were yesterday, but some of us will lose nearly everything from the disruptions they cause.

Britain needs a Conservative Party that understands the need to break the glass ceilings and broaden the narrow gates which limit and confine opportunities, unfairly blocking people from rising to fulfil their potential; a Party that equips them with the skills and attitudes they will need to grab those opportunities when they come sailing by. Only then will we be a society of big, powerful citizens who are ready to live proudly independent lives, choosing the most richly-fulfilling path in life for one's particular talents and needs, supported by a state that equips and protects one to make those choices for oneself, rather than trying to do it for them.

The prize is potentially huge. The Conservative Party would not just be giving people bigger, happier, more fulfilling lives; we would be abolishing the underlying causes of poverty too. It would not just be morally and socially the right thing to do - because poverty would be gone and Britain would be a happier, fairer place - it would help our economy.


People would develop their skills and

fulfil their talents to add more value in whichever job they choose. It would improve the country's finances and create opportunities for lower taxes by shrinking the need for parts of the welfare state. And it would have huge political dividends too, because it would remove one of the main causes of division and strife that has bedevilled British politics for decades.

“ Much of the social and economic progress achieved in the twentieth century has slowed down in the twenty-first

Bright Blue conservatives can be at the forefront of this change, describing and campaigning for the social programmes that will shatter the glass ceilings and equip our citizens to thrive.

I have made a start in my recent paper, *Poverty Trapped: Why Is Poverty Still With Us After 70 Years Of The Welfare State?*, and in my Government-commissioned review of competition policy and supply-side reforms *Power To The People*, too, but there remains plenty of scope for more creative, original thinking.

Creating change was why I got into politics, and why I am a Bright Blue conservative too: let us see what we can do next for our country. 

**John Penrose** is the Conservative Member of Parliament for Weston-super-Mare and serves as the Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Inclusive Growth



# Research update

**Bartek Staniszewski** provides an update on Bright Blue's research programme



In his manuscripts, Gottfried Leibniz lamented the pains of his pursuit of truth. He complained that "I punished myself unnecessarily... that a madness that is content is preferable to an aggrieved reason."

Our research department might sympathise with him there - but Leibniz goes on to write that "the sight of some great disturbance... among men [which saw] injustice triumph [moved me]." So too does Bright Blue continue to be concerned by the triumphs of injustice into the pursuit of truth - or so I hope, anyway.

In the post-populist political reality, carefully-deliberated opinions

are often looked down upon in favour of gut feelings and political point-scoring. But, unless carefully deliberated-on, the issues of our time will be faced by the Government not with the systematic and apt response they demand, but rather with headless and dangerous arrogance.

Late in 2022, we tackled the topical issue of race in politics. Together with British Future, we published *An agenda for action*, an essay collection

bringing together constructive approaches to address racial disparities in modern Britain from across the political spectrum. We then moved onto the less glamorous but important issue of littering.

In our report *Picking up the pieces*, we make a number of bold policy recommendations to tackle fly-tipping and littering in the UK.

Also by the end of 2022, we released *Work in progress?* The report exposed the challenges faced by self-employed people in the dusk of the pandemic and outlined policies that would improve their access to finance, savings and financial safety.

Entering 2023, we published *Building up*, a report on the future of social security in the UK. Drawing on a rich historical and political analysis, this report received extensive national coverage following its recommendation of introducing a contributory element to social security.

Following that, we released *Greater and greener homes*; the first in a series of three reports that will look at the interaction between the environment and the planning system. The report outlined a host of sensible policies to make housing development in the UK both greater and greener.

Finally, in late Spring this year, we published our essay collection, *Home Advantage*, which looked at fixing our broken housing sector. With a foreword from the Levelling Up Secretary, Michael Gove, and contributions from a plethora of key MPs and campaigners, it presented a collection of new and radical ideas on tackling this country's housing crisis.

Watch out for many more reports and events in the coming year! [📌](#)

**Bartek Staniszewski** is a Senior Researcher at Bright Blue



# Tamworth Prize 2022 winner

Jude D'Alesio outlines how public policy can help reduce fuel poverty

When Sir Robert Peel wrote the Tamworth Manifesto, he advanced from conventional Wellingtonite Conservatism and gained nearly 100 additional seats in the 1835 general election as a result. So too must Rishi Sunak's government reject conventional responses to fuel poverty and pave the way to a majority in the next general election.

Three measures would help to counter fuel poverty, one each for the short, medium, and long terms.

The first measure, for the short term, is drastically increasing the UK's energy stockpiles. The second, for the medium term, is to use fracking as a 'bridging' energy and follow a similar path to the U.S. in attempting to achieve energy independence from Russia and the Middle East. The final measure, for the long term, is to invest in the development of nuclear fusion technology which, if successful, will permanently alter the discussion surrounding fuel poverty. In Peel's words, Conservatives must 'reform to survive'.

For the short term: increasing energy stockpiles.

Firstly, the UK must substantially increase its energy stockpiles. Many proposals for short-term

measures to tackle fuel poverty include VAT cuts on energy; however, this is the wrong approach. Such a reform offers poor value for money and would do little to abate fuel poverty, as eliminating VAT on energy bills only saves £100 for the average household while costing the Treasury approximately £3.5bn per year. Larger homes owned by the wealthier also receive a greater benefit from such a cut despite being unlikely to languish in fuel poverty. This is not in tune with the simple Conservative value of fairness, from the Tamworth Manifesto to Baldwin's dream of a 'union of all classes'.

The solution to the energy crisis can, however, be found in its cause: our dependence on foreign gas, on which 85 per cent of homes in the UK rely. The UK's gas supply is sourced from abroad, principally Russia, Qatar, and Norway, making our country's energy security putty in the invisible hand of global energy markets. As international crises like the War in Ukraine have

left patent, shifts in energy prices and production have reverberating effects on international diplomacy. Any answer to fuel poverty must, therefore, include increasing our energy independence; and a short-term method of doing so is increasing our energy stockpiles.

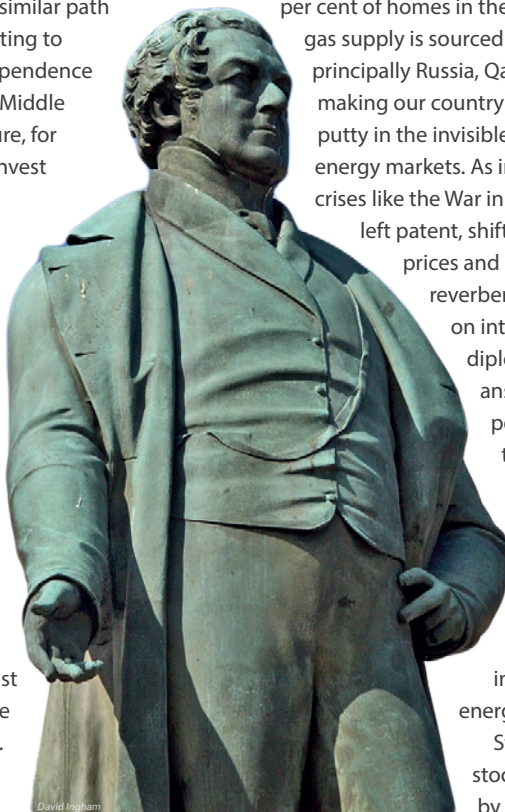
Strategic energy stockpiles are held by governments to

alleviate short-term supply disruptions, maintain national security and safeguard the economy during energy crises. Energy prices are dynamic, and unlike certain other commodities, market reaction to changes in supply and demand can be instantaneous. If a country's stockpiles indicate a well-supplied market and are continually increasing, energy prices can react with downward pressure. On the other hand, if stockpiles are low and dwindling, the opposite is true.

“ Where onshore fracking infrastructure is built, neighbouring communities should be compensated for enduring the experience

However, our country has some of the smallest energy stockpiles on the continent, leaving us vulnerable to serious disruption. The UK has a total of zero days' worth of government-owned net oil imports in its stockpile as of June 2022, the same amount as Turkey and Greece. This is significantly exceeded by other western countries such as the United States (924 days), Germany (115 days) and France (80 days).

Instead, the UK obliges industry to hold minimum stockpiles, though there is no reason for this to reduce the energy bills of consumers and thus fuel poverty, relinquishing entirely the role of government in holding its own stockpiles. Therefore, there is potential low-hanging fruit in tackling fuel poverty through the government significantly increasing its



David Ingham

>> strategic stockpiles for crises.

For the medium term: fracking as a 'bridging' energy.

Fracking is the technique of recovering oil and gas by drilling into the earth's shale rock layers at high pressures. Globally, fracking has altered the energy landscape in a drastic manner: the fracking revolution in the United States has propelled it to leading the world in oil production, creating a chain reaction with Russia attempting to find a new market in China, and the Middle East recalibrating its oil exports away from North America.

Neither has its use of fracking been relatively expensive. With a highly complex geological structure, in contrast to the relatively simplicity of the United States's, there is no suggestion that fracking will trigger a similarly significant energy revolution in the UK. Moreover, it is in no way a panacea to fuel poverty in Britain as opinion is divided on the extent to which an increase in energy supply from fracking will cause major improvements to prices.

However, it decreases our dependence on foreign energy (making us less vulnerable to international events and large price fluctuations) and acts as a bridge until cheaper, long-term measures are implemented, as discussed in the subsequent section. The growth of a fracking industry will also boost productivity and benefit the economy, creating jobs for those facing fuel poverty.

“ As Bright Blue has previously outlined, fracking is susceptible to methane leaks, a chemical up to 28 times more potent than carbon dioxide

Owing to the controversy surrounding fracking, notably with those living close to fracking infrastructure, the issue must be handled with care. For example, where onshore fracking infrastructure is built, neighbouring communities should be



Katrina\_S

compensated for enduring the experience through 'Community Benefit Schemes'.

Such a scheme would provide a fund of money (to which the company conducting the fracking should contribute) for use in the community as compensation, in an arrangement redolent of the film *Local Hero*. Another reason for listing fracking as solely a medium-term, bridging measure is its environmental impact: as Bright Blue has previously outlined, fracking is susceptible to methane leaks, a chemical up to 28 times more potent than carbon dioxide. This evidently contradicts the country's transition to renewables and net zero; however, it is submitted that the current energy crisis necessitates all options being under consideration, especially for use as merely a bridge to renewable sources.

For the long term: investing in developing nuclear fusion.

Every country faces the same question about the future of energy: will renewables dominate? Although it is fair to say that while the destination is set (reaching carbon neutrality by 2050), the precise road to it is less clear. Nuclear fusion, however, offers a choice of renewable energy separate from wind and solar and has historically received woefully low funding. In essence, fusion

consists of burning lighter elements to create heavier elements, similarly to how the sun is energised by burning hydrogen into helium.

“ Not only must the UK maintain its commitment to developing its own tokamak, it must also invest greater sums to accelerate its development

This process, in turn, releases energy. Fusion will undoubtedly ease fuel poverty through its relative cheapness: one estimate claims that \$25 (£22)/MWh is an optimistic cost of energy derived from fusion, yet not unachievable. The August 2022 average standard rate for gas from the six major gas suppliers in the UK equates to £83/MWh, thus fusion may comfortably half this as well as increasing the overall energy supply, lowering costs further.

There is an old quip that fusion is 30 years away and always will be. However, the sums currently invested indicate that it is nearer than ever. The UK declined to participate in Europe's EU-DEMO development, instead opting to build a large, spherical tokamak by 2040



>> ('tokomaks' are a specific type of fusion experiment, essentially aiming to bottle the conditions at the core of the sun). The key in developing fusion is diversity of risk: there is a likely chance that any individual attempt at fusion will fail, whereas a diverse range of countries attempting fusion needs only one to succeed for all to reap the benefits.

Therefore, it is essential for Britain to commit itself to the development of fusion and the continuation of its own fusion experiment. One can easily envisage the strawman argument being posited by a future political leader that, as our own experiment is statistically likely to fail, it does not represent value for money and should thus be scrapped.

This argument, however, ignores the

importance of diversity of risk and the necessity for global unity in achieving fusion, a 'declaration of interdependence' on energy. Not only must the UK maintain its commitment to developing its own tokamak, it must also invest greater sums to accelerate its development where possible, ensuring that fuel poverty is alleviated without delay.

When Sir Robert Peel was appointed Prime Minister, it was a move contrary to public opinion leading Peel to demonstrate that his Conservative philosophy was in fact in the best interests of the people. Nearly 200 years on, Rishi Sunak must show that his answer to fuel poverty is a departure from past failures and delivers for the British public.

This essay has proposed three measures to tackle fuel poverty. Firstly, the government must significantly grow its energy stockpiles; secondly, it must capitalise on fracking as a bridge to long-term, renewable energy; and finally, it must invest in the development of nuclear fusion. Limiting fuel poverty by achieving greater energy independence will not only improve the quality of life of those in the UK, but allow us to act with less constraint on the international stage without our dependence on foreign energy being exploited. [5](#)

**Jude D'Alesio** is a future trainee solicitor, former councillor for Long Ashton Parish Council in Somerset, and Law graduate from the University of Bristol



## Recent report

### Greater and greener homes: more homes, ready for net zero

*James Cullimore*

The UK is facing both a housing and climate crisis. We are not building enough homes. And the houses we do build are not green enough to support this country's transition to a net-zero economy. Bolder public policy is needed to support both greater and greener homes.

This report outlines and examines the key changes in government policy since 2010 to increase housing supply and reduce carbon emissions from new homes, before proposing new policies to achieve two core policy objectives. First, to speed up the delivery of new homes where development is most sustainable, such as near workplaces, shops and sustainable transport links. Second, to ensure new homes are compliant with reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

## The young Alexander

Alex Rowson produces a perceptive insight into the Macedonian legend's early life

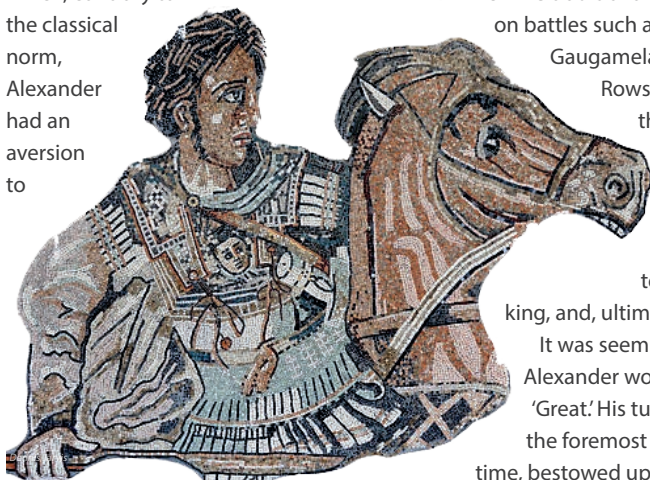


Thomas Nurcombe  
Researcher, Bright Blue

Alexander the Great has always been subject to a mixture of history and mythology. Scholars and historians – both ancient and modern – have always struggled to account for the early life of someone whose kingship and military genius dominate the historical record.

Unlike many scholars who have focused solely on his military conquests, Rowson delves into the formative years of the legendary leader, shedding light on his upbringing, relationship with his father Philip II and the influences that shaped his character. It becomes clear that Alexander's path to greatness was set long before his Asian campaigns, emphasising that his roots in Macedon played a pivotal role in his ultimate achievements.

To my delight, Rowson's work surpassed my expectations, offering fresh insights and lesser-known anecdotes that illuminate the humanity behind the myth. From the symbolic significance of his first boar hunt to his unique perspective on relationships in which, contrary to the classical norm, Alexander had an aversion to



sexual relationships – as he believed it highlighted his mortality – all the way through to paranoia and breakdown. Through these accounts, Alexander is humanised and his vulnerabilities and mortal nature – which are often hidden by romanticised narratives by Roman authors – are revealed.

“ Alexander is humanised and his vulnerabilities and mortal nature – which are often hidden by romanticised narratives by Roman authors – are revealed

Given the scarcity of accounts detailing Alexander's early life – Plutarch's problematic *Life of Alexander* being the main source – Rowson expertly weaves ancient sources with archaeological discoveries and a deep understanding of Macedonian history. His research allows readers to gain a comprehensive understanding of Alexander's formative years before diving into his renowned military exploits.

Unlike traditional biographies fixated on battles such as Granicus, Issus, Gaugamela and Hydaspes,

Rowson skillfully reveals the journey of a young man transitioning from a protective son of Olympias and student of Aristotle to a military apprentice, king, and, ultimately, immortal Great.

It was seemingly inevitable that Alexander would attain the title of 'Great.' His tutelage under Aristotle, the foremost philosopher of his time, bestowed upon him exceptional

knowledge. Moreover, he acquired the art of warfare from his father, who, had he not been murdered – with some unconvincingly suggesting Alexander's involvement – might have achieved the same level of greatness.

These, coupled with an unwavering belief in his own divine heritage, provided Alexander with the drive to accomplish extraordinary feats.

Additionally, Rowson's work extends beyond a mere biography of Alexander. It serves as an invaluable cultural history of Macedon and late-classical Greece, offering a nuanced portrayal of the region and its societal customs. By intertwining the rugged terrain and customs of Macedon with the complex dynamics of Greek civilisation, he paints a vivid picture of an empire caught between Greek and non-Greek influences, blurring the lines between civilisation and barbarism – at least in Athenian eyes.

This book is not only a significant contribution to Alexandrian historiography but also a captivating journey into wider classical history. The comprehensive approach which incorporates expert archaeology and a critical analysis of ancient sources provides a deeper appreciation of the rich cultural tapestry of ancient Macedon, its quarrels with Demosthenes and Athens and the conditions that allowed Alexander to follow in his father's footsteps to make Macedon great. [📖](#)

*The young Alexander*,  
Alex Rowson;  
William Collins;  
512 pages.  
Published 14 April 2022.

# The Russo-Ukrainian War

**Serhii Polokhy** offers a timely, yet personal analysis of the Ukraine War

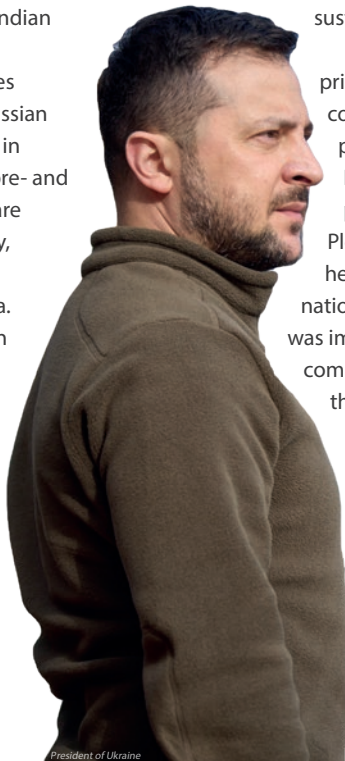


**Cosima Zaveta**

Research Assistant, Bright Blue

**S**erhii Plokhy's formidable scholarly credentials lend weight to this urgently topical work. An award-winning Harvard professor of Ukrainian history, he is hailed as "the world's foremost historian of Ukraine." His expertise clearly shows: he skilfully summarises the emergence of the Ukrainian nation-state through struggles against occupying powers and explains the rise of Putin and his imperialist ideology. The book's arch then follows the development of the war until 2023, before closing with two internationally-focused chapters: one about the West's support and an interesting, but, unfortunately shallow account of Chinese, Turkish and Indian interests.

Plokhy's writing comes alive when he unveils Russian wrongdoings: meddling in Ukrainian politics both pre- and post-invasion. Exposed are Putin's shameless bribery, economic blackmailing and fraudulent referenda. Plokhy even argues Putin prevented Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich from setting up camp in Crimea after being ousted by EU supporters, for this would have removed Putin's pretext for taking over Crimea himself. Plokhy's pain is palpable when talking of Russian war crimes against his



President of Ukraine

hometown. Civilian mass graves, cluster bombs, rape and the bombing of civilian shelters – even maternity hospitals – among them.

With these crimes in mind, it is frustrating and mind-boggling at the same time to read how Putin attempts to create a veil of legitimacy that grows more absurd with each Russian and Ukrainian death. Sometimes Putin opted for 'genocide' against ethnic Russians, sometimes denial: Russian soldiers invading southeastern Ukraine in 2014 had simply "lost their way." But Russian lies and illusions turned into practical fallacies: Russian soldiers believed they would be welcomed as liberators in 2022, quickly taking over. Instead, in burnt-out Russian vehicles, Ukrainians found parade uniforms for a victory march and sustenance for only a few days.

Equally, his writing conveys pride over his people choosing courage against all odds to preserve their nation-state.

Praised are the mayors staying put despite occupation.

Plokhy argues the invasion only helped strengthen Ukrainian nationalism. Their fighting spirit was immortalised in a popular stamp commemorating an incident from the first day of war: an incoming Russian flagship captain introduced himself by radio, "This is a Russian military ship," and demanded surrender. A Ukrainian border guard merely replied: "Russian naval ship, go f\*\*\* yourself." And, contrary to Putin's aims, the invasion only seems to have driven Russia's neighbours

further into the arms of her competitors: NATO and the EU.

Sadly, Plokhy's passion and knowledge fail to make up for the book's overall flaws. For the work of a renowned expert, one would expect well-structured arguments that are thoughtfully explored and end in interesting conclusions. Instead, Plokhy's book is an assemblage of undiscussed descriptions that require one to reconstruct his beliefs while reading.

To make things worse, his Ukraine bias is so strong that one is often left wondering whether his view of events is uncontestedly correct. Impassioned narration is not a bad thing per se, particularly considering his Ukrainian heritage, but one fears it came at the expense of scholarly thoughtfulness. If arguments are made explicit at all, they are barely discussed – rather, they seem to stem from the "pain, frustration, and anger" he says this book came out of in the acknowledgements.

One is left wondering whether Plokhy fell prey to the temptation of rushing to write about an ongoing war too soon. A later, more sober analysis would have yielded a better product and I would not be surprised if this edition will be left behind when such works appear. No doubt it is useful for its detailed description of Russo-Ukrainian history and military. But those looking for more interesting arguments and thoughtful conclusions will have to wait. [b](#)

*The Russo-Ukrainian War*;  
Serhii Plokhy;  
W. W. Norton & Company;  
400 pages.  
Published 16 May 2023.

# Conservatism: a rediscovery

**Yoram Hazony** offers an interesting, yet unrealistic take on the future of conservatism



**William Prescott**  
Researcher, Bright Blue

With electoral defeat seemingly on the horizon, the future direction of British Conservatism is increasingly up for debate. One potential avenue, national conservatism, is set out in Yoram Hazony's new book, *Conservatism: A Rediscovery*. It is a road best not taken.

Hazony promotes National Conservatism through his Edmund Burke Foundation, which has since 2019 organised conferences across Europe and the United States. Previous speakers have included Hungary's Viktor Orbán, Florida's Ron DeSantis and the philosopher Sir Roger Scruton.

Central to his argument is that conservatism has always protected traditional institutions against rationalism or ideology. At times, this neat framing leads to some strange, if clearly argued, interpretations. For example, he views the 1688 Glorious Revolution as the restoration of limited executive power after James II's attempt to create an absolute monarchy. This would surprise many historians, not least since the Tory Party emerged specifically to protect King James II against the Whigs who opposed him.

Hazony argues that conservatives centre their understanding of human nature based on empiricism and firmly reject attempts to reorder society based on abstract theories that ignore centuries of accumulated wisdom. None of these statements are original, but their restatement is welcome.

Less helpfully, at least from a political 21st century British perspective, is the central role Hazony envisages for Christianity. The state, he argues, should actively promote Christianity, because it is "the only firm foundation for national

independence, justice and public morals in Western nations." Conservative political leaders and thinkers should lead by example in the conduct of their own lives. To his credit, Hazony has tried to do just that, as he outlines in the book's final chapter.

Historically speaking, Hazony has a point — until the last century, supporting the established Church mattered hugely to most British Tories. However, it is difficult to see how emphasising Christianity would help today's conservatives electorally. Less than half the population of England and Wales now identify as Christian, a percentage that is only likely to keep falling.

“**Contrary to Hazony's understanding, conservatives in the UK only adopted liberal ideas that were ideologically compatible with their own**

The other major problem is the book's vehement hostility to liberalism. A key theme throughout is the total incompatibility of liberalism and conservatism. Liberal confidence in the unlimited power of human reason and the central role it attaches to individual rights above all else, Hazony writes, cannot co-exist with a conservatism centred on empiricism, tradition and religion. While a temporary pact with liberals made strategic sense during the Cold War, when both were fighting against a common socialist enemy, the price for conservatives, he argues, was being ideologically smothered by their new allies in both the UK and the US. Within decades, the newly-dominant liberalism, weakened by its internal contradictions, fell prey to a new strain of Marxism which now dominates major corporations, the

universities and the media: so-called 'wokeism.'

There are several problems with this. First, conflating modern 'wokeism,' with its fixation on identities based on inalienable characteristics, with Marxism, an ideological view of history as grounded in class struggles driven by structural changes in the economy, is a flawed and tiresome trope.

Second, probably because it was written by an American largely for the American market, it totally disregards the tremendously productive relationships between British conservatives and liberals that have existed since the Liberal/Liberal Unionist split in 1886. Indeed, many crucial reforms, such as the expansion of contributory old age pensions in the 1920s or the first large-scale slum clearance programmes in the 1930s were enacted by Liberals, ex-Liberals or those from a Liberal political heritage. Contrary to Hazony's understanding, conservatives in the UK only adopted liberal ideas that were ideologically compatible with their own. Conservatives have much to lose by forgetting this history.

*Conservatism: A Rediscovery* has its virtues — it is welcome to see an American conservative make the case against market fundamentalism and stress the importance of basing policy on evidence rather than abstract ideology. Those looking for a blueprint for a revived British centre-right should, however, look elsewhere. [👉](#)

*Conservatism: a rediscovery*;  
Yoram Hazony;  
Forum;  
480 pages.  
Published 25 August 2022.

