



## Getting Business Back on its Feet Again



These past ten days have largely been spent engaging with local business as it confronts the challenges ahead on the long road to economic recovery. In particular, I have spent time with some of our smaller businesses as they try to recapture local trade, listening to the concerns of retail outlets and campaigning to get farmers' markets back into operation.

In each case, there has been huge appreciation of Rishi Sunak's rescue packages from the Treasury and the furlough scheme which has brought so much needed assistance to employers. Both are a lifeline which has been the difference for some between staying open and certain closure.

However, serious questions remain over the First Minister's ill-chosen words which implied that, as a result of the spikes in Covid19 in England, Scotland would not be moving quickly to encourage tourists to come from Scotland from different parts of the UK. This was the worst possible move from the First Minister resulting in several local hotels and holiday cottage accommodations being asked if full refunds would be available should "Scotland shut its borders". Of course, the First Minister has no such powers, but this type of divisive talk is symptomatic of insular nationalist politics which could further threaten Scotland's already fragile tourism sector. Marc Crothall, the chief executive of the Scottish Tourism Alliance warned that more than 70% of its visitors come from the rest of the UK and that "any restrictions on domestic travel will have a significantly negative impact."

It is imperative that Scotland is open for business and that we do not lose any more competitive advantage, already diminished by the earlier opening of hotels, pubs, restaurants and shops in England. We are already into July and Scotland desperately needs some visitors so that the whole summer is not a washout.

But other things need to change too, most especially in the field of retail which was suffering badly even before the pandemic struck. Speaking to Mrs Eileen Connolly, managing director at AL Marketing (who has been involved in several projects across Mid Scotland and Fife) she said that retail needs to "reset the parameters of what is physically possible in a world dominated by social distancing and, for the shopping centre world, this will come at a cost. As a starting point we have to communicate clearly with our customers – our past, present and future shoppers. They are looking to the institutions they trust for guidance and comfort on the key issue of maintaining a healthy environment or we risk them staying home with the lockdown online habit."



Eileen Connolly

## Restarting Farmers' Markets

As everyone knows, Farmers' Markets are a huge asset to several towns across Mid Scotland and Fife; Cupar, Kinross, Crieff, Perth and Aberfeldy to name just some. Not only are they significant visitor attractions but they are crucial outlets for local produce and for local clubs and societies in the community to come together so it is vitally important that they are up and running as soon as possible.

In this respect, I was concerned to hear that the Kinross-shire Local Events Organisation had encountered difficulty getting local authority clearance for the planned market on 4<sup>th</sup> July despite the Scottish Government saying that markets could open on 29<sup>th</sup> June. Public safety is vitally important but there are ways to ensure this is the priority and get markets open. It is not good enough that they have to wait another month when the Scottish Government guidance said they could operate in July.



Time to buy local and time to get farmers' markets back in business.

## Daily Record

### Call from Mid Scotland MSP to get farmers' markets back up and running

*The delay in giving farmers' markets to go-ahead is concerning MSP Liz Smith who wants to see people having the opportunity to buy local again.*

A Perthshire-based MSP has called on farmers' markets to start up again across the region. Liz Smith MSP says Perth and Kinross Council should look to re-establish the markets "as soon as possible". The Conservative representative for Mid Scotland and Fife was speaking after she was contacted by Dave Cuthbert, chairman of the Kinrossshire Local Events Organisation.

He says the council has informed the group it will need to wait beyond July to host a market, citing road closure issues. Ms Smith said: "These markets are a really special feature not just of Kinross but also of places like Crieff, Aberfeldy and Perth.

"The Scottish Government is rightly urging us to 'buy local' and therefore I think it is imperative that these markets re-start as soon as possible in line with lockdown easing regulations."

A PKC spokesperson said: "We are working closely with the market operators across Perth and Kinross to ensure that markets can reopen safely when authorised to do so. "Some markets may not operate in the same way or in the same location as before so that we can ensure the ability of stall-holders and the public to comply with physical distancing."

## In praise of our NHS staff but less so for the NHS as an institution

At the weekend, the NHS marked its 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary. Naturally, any celebrations were muted but there was plenty of interesting debate about what the future should hold. Most interesting of all, was the concern that, by rightly lavishing praise on our doctors and nurses and support staff for all they have achieved throughout Covid19, there is the automatic transfer of this praise to the institution of the NHS itself when, in fact, it is in much need of reform.

In a previous newsletter, I wrote about the implications for the delivery of primary care. But as the pandemic has progressed, the unwieldy bureaucracy of the NHS has become ever more apparent. It is true that it has not been overrun by Covid19 in a way that was first thought possible. For example, the Nightingale and Louisa Jordan hospitals were built very quickly and efficiently and will now be used to help treat urgent cancer care patients, but there is no doubt at all that other pressures within the NHS were responsible for serious problems in other sectors, care homes especially. In other words, while acute

care performed reasonably well, other areas did not. The backlog in non-emergency operations and other treatments is threatening to spiral out of control – indeed, one medical journal was forecasting the UK NHS waiting list could be close to 10 million by the end of the year.

It is perhaps time to look abroad at what can be done better and it is certainly time to ensure that the “can do” approach of our Covid19 doctors and nurses is not submerged again in administrative bureaucracy. That would almost be as deadly a disease as the virus itself.

## Non-Covid hospital visiting to re-start

Meanwhile, there is welcome news that controlled hospital visiting can re-start on 13th July, following the announcement that limited non-Covid affected care home visits could start last Friday. Great care still needs to be taken. The single person visits will be able to take place in non-Covid wards providing the usual protections are still in place and I am sure they will bring much needed comfort to patients in hospital who have been unable to see family and friends for many weeks.



## School's out formally now for the summer holidays but what an ongoing mess.....

Last week saw the formal end of what has undoubtedly been one of the most difficult sessions ever experienced by our schools. Whilst families will be relieved that the pressures of home-schooling have come to an end for the time being (or at least those families who were lucky enough to have the necessary resources sent to them), there remains the anxiety about what happens next. After John Swinney's extraordinary u-turn in the space of a week about schools returning full time, we then witnessed the most extraordinary war of words between the Scottish Government, local authorities and the teaching unions about who had said what and about whether there had been the necessary consultation. Parents, and all those teachers who had earnestly spent time preparing schools for "blended learning" are, rightly, in despair about the shambles they see in government. The confusion continues about exactly who will be back at school, when, and about what child care facilities can be provided for our youngest children whose parents have been told they should go back to work.

Meanwhile, there is also confusion over the timescale for next session's SQA exams. In Parliament, I asked John Swinney to confirm whether the 2021 diet would proceed on the normal timescale (assuming there was second Covid19 health crisis) but he wasn't yet able to give that assurance. Schools need that assurance as soon as possible most especially given the fact that this year's examiners have already had such a tough time.

## SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

### WRITTEN ANSWER

1 July 2020

Index Heading: Education, Communities and Justice

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government how many former, trained teachers responded to the call from the General Teaching Council for Scotland to assist with school learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and, of those, how many had (a) primary and (b) secondary school experience.

S5W-29925

**John Swinney:** The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) contacted individuals whose GTCS registration has recently lapsed, including recently retired teachers to ensure records were up to date to facilitate any contact with employers to establish their willingness and availability to return to teaching, should this be required based on local need. There has been no formal call as yet.

We are currently working with local authorities to establish what additional staff are needed. Once we know that, we will work with local authorities to meet that demand.

And then there is the issue of ensuring more teaching resources are available to help our schools through the pandemic. This parliamentary answer I received from John Swinney did not inspire much confidence.....

## Food Standards Update

A number of readers have been in touch with me to ask about the food standards issue given some of the negative publicity that has been in the newspapers about the forthcoming trade deals. Here is the up to date letter from Liz Truss MP, Secretary of State for International Trade, to Minette Batters who is the current President of the NFU and who has been liaising with colleagues in Scotland in the NFUS.



Department for  
International Trade

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP  
Secretary of State for International Trade  
Department for International Trade  
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Dear Minette,

Thank you for your letter, and for the productive phone calls with you and your colleagues last week.

I wholeheartedly agree that any trade deal the UK strikes must be fair and reciprocal to our farmers, and must not compromise on our high standards of food safety and animal welfare. I have been very clear on both these points and will continue to fight for the interests of our farming industry in any and all trade agreements we negotiate.

As you know, this is the first time in over 40 years that the UK has pursued its own independent trade policy, and I do recognise the importance of close engagement with the industry and a clear 'roadmap', as you put it, to help inform agricultural trade policy and apply appropriate safeguards in UK free trade deals.

I am pleased therefore, on behalf of the Government, to agree in principle to the establishment of a Trade and Agriculture Commission under Department for International Trade auspices, subject to agreement on terms of reference

I support your recommendation that the Commission is not another quango or regulator, and that it is strictly time-limited. I propose that once the Commission has finished its work, it produces a report in line with its terms of reference that will be presented to Parliament by my department. Its recommendations should be advisory only.

The report, and the work of the Commission, should focus on four areas:

1. Considering the policies that the Government should adopt in free trade agreements to ensure UK farmers do not face unfair competition and that their high animal welfare and production standards are not undermined.
2. Reflecting consumer interests and those of developing countries.
3. Considering how the UK engages the WTO to build a coalition that helps advance higher animal welfare standards across the world.
4. Developing trade policy that identifies and opens up new export opportunities for the UK agricultural industry – in particular for small and medium sized businesses – and that benefits the UK economy as a whole.

I am encouraged that the NFU supports the UK's broad objectives in promoting free trade and shares our belief that free trade deals can open up significant new exporting opportunities for the UK farming industry.

I look forward to continuing to work constructively with the NFU in this area and to agreeing the terms of reference for the new Commission as soon as practicably possible.

Best wishes,

**THE RT HON ELIZABETH TRUSS MP**  
Secretary of State for International Trade  
& President of the Board of Trade

## Sport Is Slowly Returning

On a personal level, one thing I have greatly missed over the last three months has been active sport. I am no different from the thousands of other people for

whom sport brings such important added benefits to life both, physically and mentally. I know many of you are now back on the golf course, angling and playing singles tennis, and for me, last week on 29<sup>th</sup> June, I was able to re-start coaching junior cricket again, albeit with some rather different rules from normal. If people think the laws of cricket are complex, they should try socially distanced ones! Nonetheless, it was good to be back and to see the relief and joy on youngsters' faces as they could get back to the game.

Sport however, still has a long way to go until normal games can resume, something that will present added difficulties for schools as they return. In my role as convenor of the cross party group on sport in Holyrood, I am working with sport governing bodies and Scottish Government officials to ensure there is clear guidance about what is, and is not permitted. Dare I advise that we need experienced sportsmen and women to draw up the guidance rather than "administrators" who have no knowledge of the sport they are supposed to be helping....



## Zooming With Our Younger Members

This evening, I will be back on Zoom with our younger members discussing some of the issues they have said they want most to talk about. The list they

have sent for this evening includes:

- How to counter the Scottish independence debate
- What happens post Brexit
- Education opportunities
- The Environment
- Local action for the Conservatives

These meetings are proving to be very popular and also extremely helpful to elected members like myself. Alexander Stewart MSP will be joining me on this call too.

One thing I might like to ask their views on is this thought-provoking comment from last week's New Statesman; "If you waded into the fetid waters of the Twitter sewer, partisan politics and a culture of abuse are thriving. Here in amplification is the polarisation of our politics. But Twitter is marginal to most people's lives. What matters to them is their families and friends, the places they live and work, and the networks of support and community that surround them." The implication is that they want politicians to remember that. Food for thought!

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