

NOTES FROM ZOOM MEETING WITH GARETH JOHNSON, MP.

Five of us had a 45minute Zoom discussion on 5 November with Gareth Johnson, MP for Dartford, a constituency covering a little over half of the parish. This responded to CAFOD's "Parliament in your Parish" initiative, encouraging us to get to know MPs and talk about the 2021 UK presidency of the G7 and chairmanship of the Glasgow COP26 meeting.

Mr Johnson outlined some positive developments. (1) The Prime Minister is committed to seeing progress to combat climate change, involving a global effort. In South Africa, private companies are working to reduce CO2 emissions. The UK plays a part in scientific developments offering useful prospects, in particular, methods of separating Hydrogen for use as a fuel, though experience with scale-up is needed. (2) The rate of deforestation is lessening in Indonesia and South Africa. (3) There is a timetable for restoring the 0.7% GDP contribution to overseas aid. (4) Other issues include increasing supplies of drinking water and assuring education for girls.

We deplored the airmiles generated by international diplomatic events, in particular the private jet return flight to London by the Prime Minister. Mr Johnson was assured that the alternative of rail travel was unrealistic, and that a return for Prime Minister's Questions was needed. (Though, press reports suggest that a rapid return allowed attendance at a private evening function.) Pressing for immediate total abandonment of flying is not seen as helpful.

Encouraging work to improve technology can be productive. But can parliament do much to oversee and promote this? Public opinion can "encourage" MPs to keep in touch. There are a number of Science Advisors and the Science and Technology Advisory Committee reports upon various topics, e.g., showing that the vaunted Japanese carbon-neutral technology for producing steel is extremely expensive and requires further work to become sustainable.

UK ministries produce briefings indicating ways to respond to possible decisions from G7 or COP gatherings. MPs and peers are briefed by ministers after meetings, though they can also pass on enquiries. Committees take evidence from ministers and civil servants, several covering matters of interest to CAFOD. The UK will continue to be the COP Chair until the next meeting. We therefore should be able to influence developments – in particular by urging monitoring and reporting of progress.

"Agronomics" is a branch of economics dealing with the distribution, management, and productivity of land. Studies suggest that obviously conflicting results emerge from different studies, with no agreement as to whether effects are positive or negative, or if there are

trade-offs or synergies when considering multiple indicators. Further study is needed on the influence of site properties, for example. CAFOD has used indications from agronomic studies to train farmers to sustainably improve yields and better appreciate the need to assure availability of seeds, soil improvers and water at critical seasons.

"Agronomics Ltd" is an Isle of Man investment company – a private enterprise investing in technology that may help to feed the world, funding projects to develop new ways of rapidly producing food and materials traditionally derived from animals, such as meat cultivated in bioreactors.

Encouraging preference for locally grown and fresh seasonal vegetables could usefully cut food miles and allow overseas farmers to feed local people.

Plastic pollution should not be overlooked!

As the UK is an island, with several major tidal estuaries, why are barrages assessed as uneconomic? Decision makers use creative accounting to justify investment in new large nuclear power plants: why not for tidal barrage schemes? New techniques involving arrays of tethered turbines can avoid many adverse effects on marine life. The development of wave power seems largely to have halted.

Using more electric motors is praiseworthy, and houses in new developments around Dartford are fitted with charging points. We are concerned that a rush to expand use will leave a vast number of decent petrol and diesel vehicles all simultaneously being scrapped, whilst development of Hydrogen-powered vehicles could end up as a better option.

Improving local or "district" power stations could prove useful, avoiding wastage in transmission and inflexibility in supply when coping with unplanned demand surges.

We mentioned the unreliability of buses reaching our part of the constituency. Delays come from traffic in major towns and by people avoiding congestion on the national highways. A mixture of shorter and "orbital" bus routes might be more reliable than the existing "radial" lines. (Subsequently we now see a proportion of 423 and 433 services terminating at Bluewater.)

Parts of Swanscombe peninsular can be rewilded if the delayed theme park development fails, with due consideration of sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Mr Johnson expressed his appreciation of the environmental impact of our heritage thatched church in our village and of the contributions made by church communities across his constituency.