

# Time to protect the economy



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It was perhaps inevitable that England would have to go back into lockdown in November, given the way the pandemic was going and the inability of the government to put a proper track and trace system in place.

The failure of the regional tiered system of restrictions is a disaster for the whole economy but especially high street retail and its supply chain, as it has probably come too late to save Christmas as we know it.

Seeing M&S make its first loss in almost 100 years of trading and John Lewis and Sainsbury's shedding thousands of jobs underlines the unprecedented depths of the current recession – and things aren't going to get better any time soon.

Despite the huge scale of support the government has unleashed to prevent mass unemployment, there really is no magic money tree and next year people in industries which are again locked down will start losing their jobs in significant numbers.

The debate over whether it is better to save lives or livelihoods is once again dividing the Tory party just as it did over Brexit and while PM Boris Johnson has a large parliamentary majority there is no

guarantee he will retain the support of that notoriously Machiavellian bunch of back-stabbing back-benchers if they feel he is losing his grip.

It is argued that a healthy economy needs healthy people – dead people don't pay tax as one pundit put it – but the brutal truth is that the most vulnerable in society are the old and sick who probably contribute less to the economic wellbeing of the UK than the young, upon whom the virus has far less serious effects.

Older people always have the choice on how much risk they want to take and it should be up to us – I count myself in this category now – to balance quality and length of life, rather than just being told to stay indoors and not see our loved ones.

The sad fact is that 600,000 people die every year in the UK so even if 60,000 eventually succumb to the virus this year, it is only 10% above the usual death toll.

The other argument is that we must avoid overwhelming the health service, but in the first wave the Nightingale hospitals were hardly used.

The coronavirus isn't going to go away and we have to find a way to live with it without ruining our economy with constant lockdowns.

## Making CAZs drive greener transport



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The Covid-19 lockdown led to significantly fewer vehicles on the roads and much lower levels of air pollution. Many have since called for this to be sustained. But with the challenges of social distancing, private car use has risen substantially in recent months.

As well as environmental arguments, it is widely accepted that pollution itself is an exacerbating factor for those who contract Covid-19, so there is a strong impetus to find greener forms of transport.

Part of the solution could be clean air zones (CAZs), which have been gaining prominence as a means of reducing harmful pollutants in the air.

A CAZ introduces a daily charge for certain vehicle classes within a defined area. But it has been argued that vehicle classes such as HGVs are unfairly targeted by CAZs. There are currently no approved retrofit options to achieve Euro-6 compliance for HGVs (the minimum level to avoid charges in most CAZs). Upgrades of vehicles to newer models are not cheap, meanwhile.

The requirement for Euro-6 compliance

for HGVs could be considered draconian in this sector. But the London Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) has demonstrated that this, along with other standards, has led to significant gains in air quality. The Greater London Authority (GLA) identified a drop of between 3% and 9% in traffic flows in central London from May 2019 to January 2020 compared to 2018. However, there has also been a substantial fall in older, more polluting vehicles in the ULEZ. The GLA puts it at 17,400 fewer on an average day.

There is funding available in many cases for retrofit or vehicle upgrades, but as HGVs have no retrofit option and there are stricter state aid rules regarding funding for purchase of new vehicles, the options are more limited. It is important that authorities proposing such measures are well advised to ensure negative effects on HGVs can be appropriately mitigated.

### Got something to say?

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