

Prime Minister
These are the topics which
are uppermost in H. B's mind.
N.C.U. 4 February 1986

PRIME MINISTER

4.2
BRIEFING FOR MEETING WITH
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

You may wish to raise the following issues with the Secretary of State.

1. Reaction to the Rates Green Paper

Reaction has not been as hysterical as might have been feared. Kenneth Baker's Statement in the House went surprisingly well. But we must not relax now.

Comments are needed by 31 July. You could press Kenneth Baker to keep up the propaganda offensive. He should keep in close touch with Tory councils whilst they consider their replies to the Green Paper.

2. The RSG Settlement for 1986/7

The provisional July settlement showed rates rises of 5% in the Shires and 7½% in London if authorities held to this year's real level of spending. The final package had an 8% increase in the Shires and 1% cut in London. The DoE mechanisms are like a badly calibrated shower - you start off freezing; wrench the controls; and end up scalding. You could emphasise your concern to Kenneth Baker and ask what changes he could introduce next year.

3. Inner Cities

The Lord Young show on the Inner Cities is way off course and is the sort of window dressing, led by civil servants, that is likely to prove a pointless exercise. It seems that Kenneth Baker is paddling his own canoe. It might be useful to have him giving his view on the state of play on this subject.

4. Nuclear Waste

The Environment Select Committee is soon likely to criticise the Government for continuing failure to grasp the nettle and nominate sites for NIREX to dispose of low-level nuclear waste. H Committee recently failed to reconcile the political and technical factors, and later this week will be making a fresh attempt. Four options are on the table. Kenneth Baker will probably want to sound you out on the two which are likely to come closest to reconciling the factors - either four inland sites, or two inland and two coastal.

We need a firm decision, and we need to treat the environmental risks rationally rather than emotionally.

5. Green Belt

This is still the most sensitive environmental issue and we are totally dissatisfied with the way in which public sector unused land is being dispersed. We repeat that, at the present rate of disposal, the register of unused public land will be in existence for 100 years. Kenneth Baker should have a bomb put under him to dispose of all this land by auction within the next year.

6. Water Privatisation

The Water Privatisation White Paper will be published shortly. Legislation will be introduced in 1986/7 to allow the first privatisations in late 1987. The White Paper is well written and you may like to congratulate Kenneth Baker on the work he and John Patten and his officials have done.

Objections will come from one or two water authorities, from the already-private water companies, from conservation groups and fishing interests. The White Paper deals thoroughly with these potential objections.

Support will come from the more go-ahead water authorities (eg Thames, who, under the dynamic Roy Watts, want to be the first in private ownership).

You may like to ask Kenneth Baker to reassure you that the water authorities, which will be very strictly regulated under the White Paper's proposals, will be healthily saleable. He should have had some feedback from the City on this by now.

7. Housing Policy

You may ask the direction in which John Patten expects housing policy to develop when the sale of council houses/flats will have lost momentum.

BG

BRIAN GRIFFITHS