

View from Westminster July 2021

It started with a kiss. I never thought it would come to this... A hot chocolate lyric transformed into the political epitaph of Matt Hancock. The now infamous grainy image was enough to finish the two-decade long career of one of the few modern politicians who's become a name beyond his own household. Hancock will focus on attempting to preserve his seat against an indignant association with form for rewarding indiscretion with deselection. Investigations into how such imagery entered the public domain are ongoing, but meanwhile, Dominic Cummings got his man and Sajid Javid resurrects himself. Those with long memories will recall that Saj resigned as Chancellor because Dom apparently wanted to oust his SpAds. I'm sure replacing one nemesis of his jilted adviser with another was very far from Boris's mind when appointing a Secretary of State.

Away from dangerous liaisons captured on grainy CCTV, politics has been quiet/ blissfully respectful of the football being on. All looks set fair for Freedom Day 2.0 on July 19th. The Education select committee has published a provocative report on white underachievement, while GB News remains on the frontline of a culture war nobody really cares that much about. All reasonable stories, but nothing to titillate the masses. Although maybe they've been quite titillated enough.

The Treasury snuck out the consultation on business rate revaluations, alongside equally noteworthy press releases about grassroots football investment and Prince Phillip commemorative coins. It's one to watch as Rishi wrestles with one of the oldest policy labyrinths in Westminster. MHCLG was dominated by the latest £725m cash withdrawal from the Towns Fund. It's a bank that just keeps on investing in solidifying that red wall! Defra finally published its response to Glover, which effectively amounted to finding the structural reorganisation can and booting it into a consultation for later in the year. DfT meanwhile has been playing with its shiny new flexible season tickets and working out which traffic light to assign the countries of the world as we approach the school holidays.

The latest potentially apocalyptic horseman for government however, is planning. Or more specifically, how do you solve a problem like southern voters. We've looked at length in this column before at the choice facing the government. Some consider it amounts to build more houses for the kids at the expense of the views enjoyed by elderly homeowners, or listen to those most likely to vote and consign youngsters to a life of rent. For a moment, the government looked set to dig in against the shire Tories with its zonal policy. And then the Liberal Democrats kicked them foursquare in the ballots. Robert Jenrick now finds himself in the same position as countless predecessors...under huge pressure to abandon his flagship departmental policy. Will he, based on one big electoral setback? Possibly. Probably. Because they know that for every red brick in the wall there's a blue one on increasingly shaky foundations. Back to the drawing board?