The greatest place on earth

a vision for the UK 2030

Let’s imagine you are coming back to this country after a ten year absence – and you fly in to Birmingham international airport, fast becoming a key global hub. What do you notice that has changed?

Well, your plane, for starters. It’s powered by zero-carbon fuel. You are on a Jet zero guilt free trip – thanks to the campaign launched by the People’s govt. They said it couldn’t be done, but they reckoned without Rishi Sunak and project speed.

You clear immigration with your handsome brexit blue passport, but the reality is that you have already elected to be scanned electronically as you arrive.

The country has used digital ID – based on mobile phones – to drive down illegal immigration and crime. There was a bit of moaning from the civil liberties lot, but it has been immensely popular and successful.

You decide to get on HS2, only a five minute hop away by monorail, and you consider your options. London is only 38 minutes away – but Manchester is 41 minutes. You wonder how Manchester is getting on.

You hardly have time to look out of the window, but you can’t help noticing some changes. There are huge cycle highways – and some people on push bikes and some on electrically assisted machines. There are many more trees than you remember, and at one point you pass through what seems to be the beginnings of a new forest.

It’s one of the wild belts that have sprung up around the country – teeming with flora and fauna. There are beavers and otters and lynxes, and butterflies that were once on the verge of extinction, and families having picnics and generally refreshing the soul.

As you get out at Manchester Piccadilly, you notice that the air seems cleaner and purer than you remember – as indeed it is. The UK has driven down emissions of nitrous oxide, with a massive campaign to retrofit homes, and replace old boilers – so generating hundreds of thousand of green collar jobs.

What is more, the country has this very year made the switch to zero-emission vehicles, finally beginning the phase-out of ICEs. You can feel the change in the air – less Nox, less particulates; and though you can’t see it, there is less carbon too.

Decisive action means that the UK is actually on target to get to Net Zero by 2050 – and is leading the rest of the world.

You tap your phone, get an ev taxi, and go through the city. You observe the bustle, the happy propinquity of the young people – students, artists, tech entrepreneurs, start-up kings and queens, entrepreneurs of all kinds.

You recall that the last time you were in the UK, it was in the grip of the covid crisis. That nightmare seems to belong to a previous age. It was the UK that led the world not just in finding a vaccine, but in developing the lateral flow tests that enabled people to prove they were not infectious – and live life as close to normal as possible.

Now the coffee shops and the bars are all buzzing, and here as in London the agglomeration effects are working well. Plenty of people have improved their lives by learning to spend some time working remotely. But the ease of remote communication has not killed the desire for human contact. On the contrary: age old human needs – for gossip, for networks, and above all for romance (which never worked that well over zoom) - are driving the demand for ever better physical transport.

You notice the green buses, some of them electric, and some of them already hydrogen.

How on earth have they done it, you wonder, as you get out of your ev to inspect the back of a bus – and see nothing but a wisp of water vapour come from the exhaust, as sweet as a baby’s breath. How can they run buses on hydrogen?

The answer, as your taxi driver tells you, is that the People’s government took a conscious and difficult decision. They made a big bet. They decided that hydrogen was going to be part of the future; and so they set about generating enough clean power to make surplus hydrogen.

The UK has become the Saudi Arabia of wind – with beautiful new wind farms offshore. They have also used carbon capture and storage, sucking the carbon out of industrial pollution and burying it at sea, and keeping the hydrogen to power everything a battery couldn’t move: trucks, ships, trains, planes.

They have pioneered the technology in Teesside and exported it around the world, says the taxi driver.

It was part of the green industrial revolution, he says. They took a series of bets: on wind, on solar, on nuclear, on ground source heat pumps. It was expensive, but it worked. Britain is now not only a leader in hydrogen, but in battery technology – like the one powering your taxi – and in small modular reactors.

Your taxi driver says that Britain will soon crack the secret of nuclear fusion – at least within the next ten years, he says. You nod knowingly. But as you look out of the window, you have to admit the scale and the pace of the improvements.

Old bits of post-industrial wasteland – sites that had never been developed in all the booms of the post-war period – are now full of attractive brickbuilt homes, with roomy dimensions and windows big enough to let in the light. Some are flats. Some have gardens. All of them are giving the joy and excitement of home ownership to families that thought they would never have the chance.

This is among the biggest achievements of the People’s government : not just changing the planning regime, so as to simplify and accelerate the building of good homes, but actually taking charge.

Like the post-war Conservative government, they have publicly driven the creation of housing. They have broken the developers’ oligopoly. They have gripped all those buddleia-infested sites – and set up special purpose vehicles to invest.

Yes, it cost money. But the People’s government has had the wisdom to build in a recession – and is in a position to take the upside when it came.

They did what every postwar government had promised but failed to do: make a Domesday book of all the underused public land, the abandoned MOD sites, the disused Network rail cuttings – a vast acreage of potential; and they had liberated that land for beautiful development. They had even made parcels of land available for self-build.

For a generation millions of people – younger people – had become shut out from the housing market, and from the basic logic of capitalism.

It was no wonder that they adopted Corbynism, and extreme collectivist ideas.

The People’s government has changed all that. As you look around, you see water fountains that have replaced plastic bottles, and you see new statues. Yes, these days younger people don’t go around hauling statues down. Cancel culture has been cancelled.

These days people celebrate the richness and diversity of Britain’s history with new sculpted tributes – like the caryatids of great female Britons that have filled the vacant niches in the court of the Foreign Office.

And there are some frozen forms that are now missing from the landscape. The last time you were in Manchester, jogging down the canal, you came across the tragic figures of the drug addicts – men and women in the thrall of Spice – their motionless bodies contorted in strange positions like the victims of Pompeii.

Now you can see no drug addicts. Indeed, you can hardly see any graffiti, or broken windows, or boarded up buildings.

Thanks to the tax on the plastic in chewing gum, there are barely any gum splodges on the streets.

The People’s government was ruthlessly tough in its approach to crime. They not only invested in policing, but they backed the police and the forces of law and order, and they backed common sense.

They worked out that there was a great conspiracy by the elites, who were soft on crime, soft on drug use, soft on illegal immigration, and soft on human rights – and that the losers were ordinary people. The shape of the argument was a bit like Brexit.

Islington lawyers were quite happy to snort drugs with impunity – while the young boys and girls who procured those drugs were killed in gang fights.

The government had no hesitation in exposing the links. For the first time in decades they had the guts to say what previous governments had not dared (often for reasons of personal embarrassment): that drugs were bad; bad for your health, bad for the health of society.

There was a big hoo-ha. A couple of cabinet ministers had to resign.

But in the end that tough decision was vindicated. In the period before the people’s government was elected – after a long period of secular decline – there was a conspicuous rise in crime, both violent and acquisitive.

Everybody knew that drugs, and drug use, and drugs gangs were a large part of the problem. No one tackled it, until the arrival of the People’s government.

Now – as your driver confirms - the streets are safer, and the kids are no longer dying. The people’s government has helped to ensure the most important fundamental of economic prosperity – that crime should be low and falling.

And that is a blessing not just for Manchester, says the taxi driver, but for all the towns in England that were blighted by the county lines gangs.

It was crucial, he says, for the victory of the People’s government in the Blue Wall (formerly red wall) seats. Oh really, you say? How do I get there?

Back at Manchester Piccadilly station you notice a sign – that HS2 is being extended to Scotland. It seems incredible that a project that had once been so controversial is being expanded in this way.

Oh yes, says the man next to you. It check mated the Scottish Nationalists. The People’s government took powers in the UK internal market bill to invest in transport across the UK – and they astonished Nicola Sturgeon by announcing that the line would be going to Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Having called for this for years – in the expectation that no London government would let it happen – she simply didn’t know what to say.

It is one of the features of the UK in 2030, you observe, that it seems more united than ever – more fixed in its constitutional settlement. It helped that the People’s government came up with their union connectivity plan – including the tunnel from Stranraer to Northern Ireland.

But the most important unifying force was the fact and the logic of Brexit. Once out of the EU – truly out – the Scottish people could see that the only way back in was to give up so much to Brussels, not least their fisheries.

Scotland is still Scotland. Wales is Wales. But discontent has been stilled. The old tensions have abated.

The place seems happier, more at ease with itself. You take Northern Powerhouse rail east – on a line that would have taken you hours – and before you know it you have arrived.

You are in a Blue Wall seat – one of the constituencies the Conservatives captured in 2019, and which everyone said they would never hold.

The first thing you notice – and the fact fairly screams at you – is that everyone seems markedly thinner. It’s not just that they are now doing compulsory sport in school, and cycling a lot. It’s the whole new approach to health.

The NHS has finally grasped the potential of technology of all kinds – not just to cure people, but to stop them getting sick in the first place. People are using apps to monitor their heart rate, their oxygen levels, their blood sugar – to say nothing of the number of steps they have walked that day.

They are eating delicacies from all over the world (thanks in part to the Free Trade Deals the UK has done). But they are, on the whole, eating better, and eating less. The People’s government paid you pounds to lose pounds – and it worked.

People are fitter, happier, and the nation as a whole is more sporting. One of the reasons you have decided to fly home after ten years is that the World Cup is being held in England, and for once the home side has a very good chance of winning.

There is a football club here – indeed there are all sorts of cultural attractions; a theatre, an ice rink. Is that a Waitrose? Families are staying here, people are setting up businesses here – because the quality of life is so good.

You see a bunch of children walking home – not being driven – and again you observe that there are no longer any spherical members of the class.

The UK is now moving up the Pisa rankings in maths and science – thanks to new specialist maths schools – but all schools, on the whole, are doing better. Teachers are being paid properly. Pupils are being given one to one tutorials – transforming the prospects both of kids with potential to excel, and of those who are in danger of being left behind.

There is a new culture of excellence. The idea of competition, and ranking, is no longer taboo. They are now explicitly applauded. The educational establishment is changing, as more and more idealistic young teachers emerge from the new teacher training colleges.

And how has it all happened? How did the People’s government afford it all?

You can see the answer in the businesses, the shops, the restaurants, the mini-factories, here in this Blue Wall town. The secret was growth – and confidence.

They got crime down, the put in the transport infrastructure, they put in gigabit broadband in every remote village in the country.

They transformed the skills potential of the country with a lifelong plan – whereby everyone was entitled to four years of post-18 education, from the student loan company, whether in technical skills or in the form of an academic degree.

In other words they ended the snobbish and pointless distinction between further and higher education – and gave British adults a real chance to retrain.

They invested in science – with a new British ARPA, in the knowledge that this was the only way to ensure the long term innovative power of the country.

They created the most dynamically pro-business and tax-competitive environment in Europe – and with all this they created the framework, the bedrock, the flowerbed, that allowed individual enterprise and innovation to flourish as never before.

They unleashed the potential of the towns and communities that had been left behind. They united and levelled up, as they promised they would – and that is how they were elected again.