

Reshaping thinking

Published: October 5, 2026, 6:53 am

The [event that we held in Ely](#) on Saturday was, I think, a success. My team assured me they felt this way, and I have received enough thank-you notes to suggest many attendees felt the same.

As I made clear in advance, and as was reiterated in [yesterday's video](#) and [supporting blog](#), the focus was on solution-focused campaigning.

In my opening presentation, which we might share when the recording has been checked, I outlined the many reasons why, at this moment, campaigning of this sort is appropriate. John Christensen and I then shared our experience of working in this way, but whilst some of the comments in the Q&A sessions that followed indicated that those attending did understand the importance of imagining what a better world might look like if we are to campaign for it, I am also aware that many still need assistance to imagine what this might look like.

I think that was an important lesson for me to learn. Just because I can imagine a world in which the question with regard to any proposal that is made is “can we resource it?” rather than “can we afford it?”, which is the change in stance that modern monetary theory enables, this does not mean that everyone else can do so. It is now apparent to me that I do need to spend more time explaining just how this transition from our current way of thinking to that which we need might occur.

At the same time, it is obvious that I also need to answer in greater depth how this transition might take place, because this might be the area where greatest uncertainty exists. To use a metaphor, MMT might be a better mousetrap than any existing mousetrap available on the market, but that does not mean that everyone is going to be persuaded to buy it. I did, in fact, lay out quite a number of reasons in my presentation why there might be considerable institutional difficulty in persuading organisations from the Treasury, to our political parties, to the OECD, to the Bank of England, to the World Bank and the IMF, and then the world beyond, to believe that this is necessary.

Perhaps my two biggest reflections arising from the day were that I need to take on these two tasks. I need to explain the transition to MMT, and why it might happen.

Saying so, however, there might be a third task to add. My son James got in one of the last questions of the day, and until he asked, I was quite unaware of what it might be. What he actually did was throw back at me a question that I had previously asked him, which was the standard solution-focused question, which is: if the world was a better place, how would you be able to tell?

Because of the way in which John Christensen chaired the whole afternoon (for which I thank him), I had a minute or so to contemplate how to answer that question before having to do so.

When explaining the difference I would look for, I did not refer to ideas or policies. Instead, I focused on what people would actually observe. To do so, I highlighted not just a delivery mechanism, but the consequence of its use. That mechanism would involve the resurrection of effective local government in the UK, which was something that Margaret Thatcher set out to destroy.

The history of local government in this country is now largely forgotten, but from the late 19th century onwards it was local initiative, backed by both local taxation and local borrowing, that built the foundations that transformed a great deal of Britain in ways that are still the bedrock of much of what we expect from our society.

Local authorities built sewers and clean water supplies, transforming health.

They created town gas, and later built and owned most of the country's power stations, delivering both heat and power to local communities.

After that, they built tramways, trolley systems and then the bus systems that should still be the foundations of local transport networks.

And they did, of course, provide healthcare and education.

What is more, they were the biggest house builders for a long time, and many of the houses they built were of high quality, with gardens and rooms of decent size.

They also provided parks, libraries, leisure facilities, theatres, swimming pools, other sports facilities and, in some parts of the country, many of the golf courses, not least in Scotland, where the municipal golf course still exists.

I know, of course, this was a different era, and capital intensity was lower, but the point is that the imagination and the attention were available to ensure that these things were delivered, and the idea that they should be delivered through municipal, democratically elected authorities was embraced by those in power, with local business people often working alongside local authority officials to create these outcomes.

This was a form of democracy in action which we have largely lost sight of, and what is more, it was about meeting local need with local delivery in a fashion that was accountable to the community that was served.

If that were to happen now, the world would look very different from what we have today. I can imagine this better possibility. I think it would be possible to deliver it. That is the type of outcome that I am talking about when I talk about solution-focused thinking and campaigning.

There are, then, three issues to look at here, and I will be doing so, and I reiterate my thanks to all those who came on Saturday, because you have helped reshape my priorities as a result.