

Feeling good

Enthused by the Olympic spirit **Richard Barr** jumps on his bike to rescue the country from austerity

For a few years I watched it grow. Every time I passed through Stratford station the little bits of Meccano were larger and more plentiful. "What a waste of money" I thought as my Norwich train trundled through.

And that attitude remained fixed until a few days before the Olympics started. Then Mitt Romney the diplomatically challenged Republican candidate for the US presidential election weighed in and queried whether we would be ready for the start of the games.

Apologies to Republican supporters, but is Mitt Romney (or George Bush before him) really the best that a huge and resourceful country like the United States can find as potential leaders of its main opposition party? But thank you, Mitt, for setting me on the road, if not to Damascus, then at least to Stratford. From the moment I heard his fatuous remarks I was converted to the Olympic dream. I bought flags, CDs with vaguely Olympic themes and a T-shirt. I dusted off my old copy of *Chariots of Fire* by Vangelis, shed tears at the powerful opening ceremony and almost every time after that when we won gold.

I even turned out to watch the caravanserai bringing the Olympic torch through Cromer attended by street performers, more police cars than Norfolk has ever seen in one place and a free fizzy drink from a commercial company that does not need a plug from me to advertise its wares.

Pride and nostalgia

Then when it seemed to be all over, along came the Paralympics which were, if anything, more spectacular as the heroic contestants overcame all manner of difficulties and disabilities to excel in their chosen sports.

As I type this, my train back to Norwich passes through Stratford with its now complete and fully worthwhile Olympic park and I feel a combination of pride and nostalgia – pride in something that I have been privileged to live through, but nostalgia because I am not likely to see it again in my lifetime.

With hindsight, it is clear that the government was entirely right to spend money we did not have on an event that has united and inspired the country more, I guess, than anything that has happened since we gave the Germans a bit of a hiding back in the 1940s.

It is vital that we now make sure that the Olympic legacy does not get swallowed up in some virtual inheritance tax.

We need to find a way of turning the oasis of the Olympic experience into the fertile feel good factor of the whole country – and not just London thank you Boris. But how? I have 2 prescriptions:

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Prescription 1: I am no economist, so I am therefore entirely qualified to tell the government what to do. The economy is not some amorphous being out there in the clouds, akin to God. The economy is our people producing goods and services which you and I buy (or sell). It is fuelled by people feeling that there is a future and who are confident enough to spend on more than the necessities of life.

We need another multibillion project coupled with announcements that jobs are being created and money is being poured into the system – something like the new deal in the USA of the 1930s, something to give people hope that this country has a future and something to persuade our people that it is worth staying here rather than flounce off to Australia (as many have done).

Mr Osborne has got it all wrong. If he announced tomorrow that all is now well with the economy, that money will now be released for ambitious building programmes (a sports stadium in every town, new parks, treadmills for members of parliament) that new jobs would be created and old jobs reinstated, it would cause a spot of inflation but would do far more good than all the austerity measures. So go on Mr O – I dare you. The Barr solution surely cannot make things any worse than they are at the moment.



Feel Better

Prescription 2: Exercise is key. In an evanescent flash of enthusiasm I bought a new bicycle 10 years ago with more gears than I have years of life under my belt. I rode it once or twice and let it grow cobwebs for a decade.

Directly inspired by the Olympics I started riding again in earnest (have you noticed how many more people are out on bicycles now?). Now a day seldom passes without my two-wheel fix as I explore the numerous country lanes, charge down bridle paths and dodge speeding motorists. It is true what they say – half an hour of strenuous pedalling feels great, and it even helps to deal with those knotty problems that all lawyers face: the fish files (the longer you leave them the worse they smell).

Even if the economy does not bring on a feel good factor, exercise will, as I found to my cost. I recently cycled to North Walsham post office with my day's offering of entirely reasonable letters to reluctant defendant solicitors. It was just after the end of the main Olympics.

The place was festooned with Olympic merchandise. "Go on you ought to buy something" said Sam from behind the counter as she took my post. Then because I was glowing from all that exercise she painlessly relieved me of £14 for a £5 official Olympic five pound coin – a mere 280% more than its face value.

I happily bicycled home, confident that I had just single-handedly restored the economy of the country to good health.



Richard Barr is a consultant with Scott-Moncrieff & Associates LLP (richard.barr@paston.co.uk)