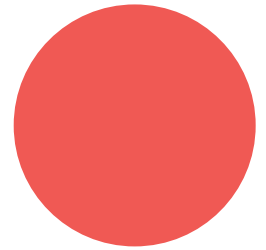


# The real estate strategist

*The virus proves to be less of a problem than the control it makes us hand to government over our daily lives*

Malcolm Frodsham



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Constant monitoring: where I've been, my temperature, heart rate, blood pressure, pulse oximetry. The new digital-NHS, in June 2021, provides comprehensive, all-encompassing, total healthcare. The health referendum that

brought it was not bitterly contested. The promise of data sales to Microsoft, high-tech jobs and research funding for the bankrupt education sector outweighed privacy considerations. The slogan 'take back control' won its second referendum.



Fear of the virus dissipated over the summer of 2020, but was quickly replaced by fear of the app. Many people were reluctant to risk any activity that might bring a compulsory, strictly enforced, three-week isolation. Companies were even more fearful of being highlighted as a hot-spot for the virus.

My digital health record allows me to buy a train pass at the monthly auction. The 10:42, coach C, seat 52. Home on the 23:24. I look forward to my one day a week in London, although it seems to take an additional day to meet client protocols in advance for a single face-to-face meeting. Every week I put on a disposable face mask and then discuss in muffled tones the latest in the ‘spread the load’ campaign. Stopping the spread of the virus might have been the catalyst, but the deadly heatwave of summer 2020 was a timely reminder of other threats.

The kids now go to school only on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with compulsory expeditions every Friday to boost social interaction. The cut-off age for teachers, after which they can work only virtually, was set at 40 – how long before I’m not allowed to work freely either? The irony of the government’s roll-out of free super-fast broadband was not lost on anyone.

*“Fear of the virus dissipated over the summer of 2020, but was quickly replaced by fear of the app.”*

We share the office with four other companies. We’ve never met, and the ultraviolet germicidal robot cleaner irradiates any trace of them every night. Like every company, we have had to draw up a plan to survive a 40-day global lockdown. Like most companies, we could now survive a 365-day lockdown.

Recording my response to the government’s official monthly research topic has become my sole means of networking: a short presentation followed by rapid questions and a general discussion. All virtual of course; industry lectures were a victim of the new health and safety laws.

I use the late finish to catch a show. The debate on which cultural and sporting activities could resume had been the most heated as lockdown lifted. Personally, I like the double-sized seats and there is never a cough to be heard.

It could have all have been so different. We could have slipped back into life as it was before the virus, but the class-action lawsuit by healthcare workers had put the politicians in a corner. The lawyers were experts on viral loads and the aerosol effect. No politician was going to risk a winter outbreak, vaccine or no vaccine.

Do I miss the old high street? Certainly not. The Uber-run driverless taxis and delivery robots share the town centres with bikes. The change was rapid. The promise to deliver ‘a generation of change’ was the slogan. Delivering what Amazon wanted was the reality. There have many victims of the virus, but some big winners too.

### My predictions for June 2021:

UK in recession:	no
Sterling vs US dollar:	lower
Sterling vs euro:	higher
UK base rate:	lower than 1%
UK RPI:	lower than 2%
Halifax UK house price index:	lower
US president:	Biden
UK/EU trade deal:	no
UK/US trade deal:	no

*When this is all over, I will kick myself for not seeing it coming.*

Malcolm Frodsham is a Director at Real Estate Strategies.