

Thursday  
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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

Thursday 13 July 2017

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# House of Commons

*Thursday 13 July 2017*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### TRANSPORT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Local Transport Projects: Funding

1. **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): What steps he is taking to provide funding for large local major transport projects. [900451]

11. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What steps he is taking to provide funding for large local major transport projects. [900461]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** Before I start, may I welcome the new members of the Labour Front-Bench team to their positions? I also congratulate the new Chair of the Select Committee on Transport, the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), on her success in the election yesterday.

Under the large local majors programme, the Department has already given two schemes the go-ahead. We are currently looking at the case to approve up to four more and are funding development of a further 13 schemes that will be considered in the near future. Last week, we announced the creation of a major road network that will enable an even greater number of local road improvement projects to come forward. The details of that scheme will be consulted on later this year.

**Luke Hall:** The road to nowhere in Yate was built in the 1970s and was abandoned. It is now used as a film set. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the road should be reopened? What financial assistance is his Department making available for projects such as that, which would dramatically reduce congestion in Yate?

**Chris Grayling:** Having walked the road to nowhere with my hon. Friend, I rather agree that it would be better if it had genuine motorists on it, rather than ones in soap operas. I hope that he will continue to encourage his local enterprise partnership and others to bring forward proposals for that road. Through the growth fund, we provide support for schemes such as that. The scheme may also be eligible for consideration as part of the major road network, depending on the connectivity

at either end, but I commend him for his work on the issue. I rather agree that it would be better if the road were open for motorists.

**Michael Tomlinson:** As you know, Mr Speaker, Dorset is a wonderful place to live, work and visit, but Dorset's roads, including the A350, north-south, and the A31, east-west, do become congested, especially in the summer months. What assurances can the Secretary of State give me and my constituents that major infrastructure projects in Dorset are a priority for the Government?

**Chris Grayling:** There are two ways in which I hope we can deliver support for my hon. Friend and his constituents. For those parts of the strategic road network that run through Dorset, Highways England is currently reviewing needs and looking at what the next generation of projects should be. There is also the creation of the major road network and the opportunity to develop far more bypasses. I think that will play an important role in places such as Dorset, where many towns suffer intensive through traffic and are not suited to such traffic.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): Tyne and Wear Metro customers are affected daily by failing trains; it has the lowest performance level of any equivalent system in the UK; that includes the oldest rolling stock on the London underground. That is largely due to the fact that the metro is well past the 35 years for which it was designed. Is the Secretary of State aware of the situation? When will he provide the funds to replace the fleet?

**Chris Grayling:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his re-election as Chair of the Backbench Business Committee. I am well aware of the issue that he has raised. I recognise the importance of the metro to Newcastle and the Newcastle area. I am pleased that, in the last few years, we have put several hundred million pounds of investment into the network. My Department is looking very carefully at what the best options are. I understand the need to make changes, so that the metro can carry on serving people in the way it has in the past.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State commit to supporting the Welsh Government's plans by providing a comprehensive funding package for the South Wales Metro?

**Chris Grayling:** Of course, central Government are providing a substantial contribution to the South Wales Metro. I have also extended an offer to the Welsh Government to enable them to take over that infrastructure, so that they can run a truly integrated service on that route. I am waiting with interest to see what plans they bring forward to make that vision a reality.

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): It is 30 years since Crossrail and the Thameslink upgrade project were first proposed. Does my right hon. Friend welcome the fact that it is a Conservative Government who have seen those projects make such progress towards completion in a few months?

**Chris Grayling:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am very excited by Crossrail, not only because of what it will deliver for London but because it is the

biggest engineering project of its kind in Europe. I hope that we will be able to build on that expertise, and that UK plc will take advantage of what has been done by winning contracts internationally. When it opens next year, Thameslink will make a real difference to passengers to the north and south. I am proud of what we are achieving.

**Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for coming to my constituency during the general election campaign. What does he intend to do about the terrible transport infrastructure investment and the inequality that exists between London and the north-east, resulting in £1,943 per person being spent in London and just £220 per person being spent in the north-east? I do not begrudge London that investment, but people in North West Durham are as important.

**Chris Grayling:** I have never doubted that. Of course, the balance between regions will depend on what projects are happening at the time. The hon. lady will have seen in our manifesto the commitment to the northern powerhouse rail programme, which will mean a significant change in the balance. I am waiting for Transport for the North to come forward with its recommendations on the form that should take. There are other benefits for her constituency. It will see the arrival in the very near future of a new generation of express trains on the east coast main line, which will be vastly better than her constituents have at the moment.

**Ms Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): The Gibb report put forward a solid business case for the electrification of the Uckfield line, which runs through my constituency of Wealden. Will the Secretary of State meet me and local campaigners to get this project on track?

**Chris Grayling:** I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend, and I absolutely recognise the issue. The other part of deliberations around the Uckfield line is the private-sector proposal, which I have said we will happily look at, to create BML2—the Brighton main line 2. We should look at all these things in the round and ask what is the best future for that route, but I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Why does not the Secretary of State for Transport tell his friends that some of these so-called projects are pie in the sky from a Government who are already committed to spending more than £80 billion on High Speed 2, under which there are going to be two tracks through Derbyshire—not one, but two: one a slow track and one a fast track? Why does he not get real and understand that there should be a reassessment of HS2? He only has a tiny majority, and believe me, a lot of Members on both sides of this House are fed up with the idea of spending money in the far distant future on HS2 when there are all these projects on today's Order Paper on which they want action.

**Chris Grayling:** I am very surprised that the hon. Gentleman is opposing a scheme that will deliver capacity improvements and journey improvements between the great cities of the north, and link Birmingham to Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield and Leeds, and that will make a real difference economically to the areas he represents. It is a project that is overwhelmingly supported by those who represent those communities in the north.

## Airports/Ports: Effect of Leaving EU

2. **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on passenger capacity at airports and ports of the UK leaving the EU. [900452]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** My Department is working closely with a number of other Departments, including the Home Office, to ensure that ports, airports and other transport operators are fully prepared for when we leave the EU. I am committed to putting passengers at the heart of our transport policy, and that will certainly apply to the arrangements that exist when we leave the EU.

**David Linden:** Brexit will present profound challenges for immigration at our ports and airports, but the Tourism Industry Council forecasts that there should be a 200% increase in resources for the UK Border Force while in effect there has been a 15% cut, despite an 11% increase in passenger numbers. How does the Secretary of State square that circle, and how can we ensure that we will have passenger safety after Brexit?

**Chris Grayling:** Our ambition after Brexit is to have borders that function as closely as possible to the way they currently do. We do not want to deter tourists or businesspeople from coming to the country. Having a managed migration system does not mean that we suddenly have to create barriers to tourists, and that is not our intention.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Secretary of State did not provide any substance in that answer on the discussions he is having. Some 23 million inbound passengers from the EU pass through UK airports each year, and they are processed quickly using special lanes and scanning. What funding has the Secretary of State identified is required for infrastructure and resources to avoid queues for those coming here? He might also be aware that the EU is planning an ESTA-type visa system for non-EU citizens, so has he had discussions about the impact of that when the UK leaves the EU?

**Chris Grayling:** Of course, we have discussions all the time across the Government about post-EU exit arrangements—we had a Committee meeting to that effect yesterday—but as I said to the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden), it is not our intention or desire to erect barriers at the borders, for tourists arriving, for example. Indeed, we are investing in things like automated gates to speed the flow through our borders, and we will carry on doing things like that.

**Alan Brown:** Another potential impact on passenger capacity is the negative impact if the UK does not remain part of the open skies agreement. That is very important for regional airports such as Prestwick, adjacent to my constituency. The Prime Minister said this week that she had discussions with President Trump on open skies, but can the Secretary of State provide an assurance that the UK will remain part of open skies and the single aviation market?

**Chris Grayling:** I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that I am absolutely confident that after we have left the EU there will be an open skies agreement

with the United States. I have had discussions with my US counterpart; there is an absolute desire on both sides of the Atlantic to make sure that the aviation arrangements remain as they are at the moment.

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): Can the Minister clarify that on leaving the EU we will remain members of the European Aviation Safety Agency, so as to maintain and grow our passenger capacity in accordance with our economic needs?

**Chris Grayling:** Obviously the details will come out in the negotiations, but we want to continue to collaborate with our European partners on air safety issues, just as we do with other organisations around the world, such as the US Federal Aviation Administration, and I see nothing to suggest that that will change after we leave.

**Karl Turner:** But have we not already seen this Government's shocking acceptance of departing from EASA safety standards by condoning the wet-leasing of Qatar Airways services to replace the poverty-paid British Airways mixed-fleet crews, in which the substitute crews' hours will not be subject to the safety standards prescribed by EASA?

**Chris Grayling:** I am sure that all the international airlines that operate into and out of the United Kingdom maintain proper safety standards. They are subject to regulation at European and international levels, and they would not be able to use UK airports if we were not confident that they were safe airlines to fly with.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Lloyd Russell-Moyle. Not here. I wish he were here. I hope the fellow is all right. Anyway, we move on. I call Rachel Maclean.

### Cycling and Walking

4. **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): What measures his Department is taking to encourage cycling and walking. [900454]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):** The Government very much seek to make cycling and walking the natural choices for short journeys, or as part of a longer journey. In April this year we published the first-ever statutory cycling and walking investment strategy for England. The strategy details our plans for increasing cycling and walking and identifies £1.2 billion of funding, which may be invested until 2021.

**Rachel Maclean:** I very much thank my hon. Friend for his response. My constituency has many footpaths, cut-throughs and small tracks that link our green spaces together. These are extremely pleasant for residents to make use of in their leisure time. However, they are not always visible on mapping platforms such as Google Maps. We would like to encourage their use to promote health and wellbeing in the constituency, so will the Minister tell me what discussions he has had with those technology platforms to make those paths more accessible to local residents?

**Jesse Norman:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question and share her delight in these informal paths, of which we have an enormous number in Herefordshire, as she might imagine. Local authorities are best placed, in the first instance, to use their knowledge and understanding of local networks, as are tourism agencies and local

map providers. From my point of view, there have not yet been any discussions with the electronic mapping services, but I very much take my hon. Friend's point and I have already made plans to meet some of them in order to take forward this agenda.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The Minister will know that many cyclists are killed and injured on the roads every year. Just on the edge of my constituency, one person was killed and two were injured this week. We need to look at improving cycling, and we must have discussions with the Health Department. What discussions has the Minister had with the Health Department to ensure that people get more exercise but are also kept safe on the roads?

**Jesse Norman:** I absolutely recognise the problem that the hon. Gentleman raises. I have not yet personally had any discussions of that kind, but the Government are making significant investments in improving safety for cyclists. That includes training and improved cycling facilities such as cycle lanes. That will continue to be part of our programme over the next few years.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): Can the Minister assure me that he is having regular discussions with the Department for Communities and Local Government about promoting cycling and walking networks in new developments? We have a massive opportunity in Taunton Deane now that we have garden town status. In particular, I know that constituents would love to link up Bishop's Lydeard, Cotford St Luke and Norton Fitzwarren with a cycleway. Will the Minister agree to meet me to discuss providing help with some pots of money to unlock that?

**Mr Speaker:** Possibly even on the prospective cycleway.

**Jesse Norman:** As a keen cyclist, I look forward to meeting my hon. Friend and discussing that matter. There are plenty of existing pots of money that are potentially available for applications, and we as a Department work closely with the DCLG, notably on the local growth fund.

### Rail Electrification: South Wales

5. **Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): What steps he is taking to electrify the rail network to Swansea and further west. [900455]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** I congratulate the hon. Lady on her election to this House. Electrification work is continuing on the Great Western main line, but the good news for her constituents and others in south Wales is that the new generation of electric trains will arrive in Cardiff and Swansea this autumn, providing more seats and better journey experiences. That is good news for rail users in south Wales and the west country.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** It has been reported that the Secretary of State is preparing to announce yet further delays to the Great Western main line electrification programme, and my constituents in Gower are fed up with the contempt that the Government continue to show them on investment. The Secretary of State has said that the

programme will happen, but will he promise that it will not be delayed any further? We need to make Swansea the gateway to west Wales.

**Chris Grayling:** I appreciate the importance of transport to Swansea, and that is precisely why I am doing what the hon. Lady's constituents will want, which is to deliver them a better journey experience not in several years' time but this autumn. They will have a new generation of trains that will provide much better journeys to London, which is exactly the kind of service they want. When the first new train comes to Swansea, I hope that she will be there to see it and will realise what a difference it will make to her constituents' rail journeys in south Wales and elsewhere.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on moving ahead with the electrification of the rail line into south Wales and through Swansea. I remind him that the electrification of the railway as far as Swansea was announced by a Conservative Secretary of State, and that the Labour Government did not electrify a single inch of the rail lines in Wales to improve the Welsh economy.

**Chris Grayling:** If I remember rightly, the Labour Government electrified only 10 miles in 13 years. My right hon. Friend will understand that we have to ensure first and foremost that we are delivering better journeys for passengers, and I am pleased that this autumn's changes and the new trains arriving in Swansea and other parts of south Wales will lead to an immediate improvement in passengers' journeys. That is what they really want.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): In order to make the most of the benefits of electrification in south Wales, we need new stations to take advantage of capacity on the line. The proposals for St Mellon's parkway in the east of Cardiff are good, and they are backed by the private sector, the Welsh Government and Cardiff Council and have cross-party support. When can we expect a decision about money from the new stations fund?

**Chris Grayling:** I also think that that is an interesting proposal, and it does not actually need quite the same mechanism of approval as a station built with public funding. I am happy to see the project go ahead. The real issue is ensuring that it can work with the timetables, so that trains can stop and the service can work. As a private sector-funded project, if it is practical, I can see no reason why any of us would do anything other than support it.

### Transport Infrastructure Investment

6. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What steps he is taking to balance the distribution of transport infrastructure investment between London and other regions. [900456]

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** It is always a delight to perform under your benevolent gaze, Mr Speaker. The industrial strategy Green Paper set out the Government's commitment to take account of the balance of spending per head on

infrastructure between different regions. The hon. Lady will be familiar with the transport investment strategy—published just last week—which sets out the Government's priorities for transport investment, supporting growth right across the country. I assure her that how projects contribute to creating a more balanced economy will in future be weighed, measured and valued in a way that it has never been before.

**Diana Johnson:** But we know that London gets 10 times the investment that Yorkshire and the Humber does. While Crossrail 2 has already been earmarked for £27 billion, the rail electrification to Hull has been scrapped by Transport Ministers, the A63 upgrade has been delayed, and the Hull chamber of commerce is concerned about the downgrading of TransPennine services. In Hull, we pay our taxes and we pay higher fares, so when are we going to get a fair deal on transport investment?

**Mr Hayes:** The hon. Lady is being untypically churlish—*[Interruption.]* No, untypically churlish. The Government have committed to build the infrastructure to support regional growth. She knows that that is why we are increasing Government infrastructure investment by 50% over the next four years, supporting growth and jobs right across the country. That includes the £15 billion we committed to the first road investment strategy, which she will know involves schemes right across the country—south, east, west and north. But let me find common ground with her; she is right that her part of the country deserves its place in the sun, which is why we must rebalance our investment to reflect local needs such as hers.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): Bradford is one of the biggest cities in the country and, in the last Parliament, the Government were very supportive of it being a stop on Northern Powerhouse Rail. Is it the Government's position that they will make sure that the investment is provided to ensure that Bradford is a stop on Northern Powerhouse Rail?

**Mr Hayes:** My hon. Friend has made that point previously to champion the cause and interests of people in Bradford. We are waiting for proposals from Transport for the North. I have no doubt that he will lobby for and so contribute to those proposals, and that he will make his case to Transport for the North. We will consider the proposals when we get them, but I fully understand the strength of his argument.

22. [900475] **Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): While I do not dispute the need for investment in transport infrastructure across the country, the fact remains that promised investment in London, such as for additional carriages on Southeastern services, has yet to materialise. The rail Minister, the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), said on 30 March that it will be happening "very soon". Can we have an update?

**Mr Hayes:** The rail Minister has made it a priority, and when he makes things a priority, they get done.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): The Minister spoke about places in the sun a minute ago, and I am sure he was thinking of Cleethorpes. As he knows from his recent visit to my constituency, one of the urgent

priorities is the resurfacing of the A180 to remove the concrete surfaces. Does the Department have any plans that will help that project? As he was unable to answer Question 3, perhaps he could develop the role of apprentices in major schemes.

**Mr Hayes:** I am always willing to do that, as you know, Mr Speaker.

I was pleased to visit the Cleethorpes constituency to unveil the new road we built as part of our road investment strategy. My hon. Friend is right, however, that there is a challenge associated with the nearby road surface. I considered that at the time, and the Secretary of State has asked us to look at these things in greater detail. I can assure my hon. Friend that ensuring roads are fit for purpose, as well as investing in new roads, is at the heart of all we do.

**Mr Speaker:** We are very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, I am sure.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The east coast main line between London and the north is in urgent need of infrastructure investment to end the disruption caused by failures of the antique overhead power lines. How much does the Minister expect Virgin Trains East Coast to contribute to that?

**Mr Hayes:** The east coast main line is the line I use regularly, and I am extremely familiar with the quality of that service. The hon. Lady will know that the new express trains we will be using on that main line by the end of 2018 will offer greater capacity, reduced journey times and more reliable services.

**Rachael Maskell:** So not only does the Minister not answer my question but he does not know the amount the operator has to contribute, yet he is about to dig into the back pockets of taxpayers to bail out the Stagecoach-Virgin consortium when, just two years ago, the Government took East Coast out of public ownership after returning £1 billion—£1 billion!—to the Treasury. How much will the Virgin Trains East Coast contract retrofit cost the taxpayer? Does he not draw the same conclusion as the Labour party that, as we pay for private and make savings from public rail, only a publicly owned rail franchise can operate in the public interest?

**Mr Hayes:** My goodness, Mr Speaker. This is like a journey to a past that never happened. I remember one of British Rail's last, and perhaps most poignant, slogans: "We're getting there". Well, getting there is a pretty fundamental requirement of any journey. Could there be a less ambitious objective than merely getting there? That is what nationalised railways were like—we all remember them. They were a disaster. The cost of renationalising the railways in the way the hon. Lady recommends would be at least £19 billion, which is £19 billion that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) and others want to spend on all these other schemes.

**Mr Speaker:** Our only surprise is that neither Yeats nor Samuel Taylor Coleridge featured in the answer provided by the right hon. Gentleman.

## Roads: Mid Sussex

7. **Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): What plans he has to improve the road network in Mid Sussex constituency. [900457]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):** I will also attempt to keep Keats and Coleridge out of this answer.

Mid Sussex will benefit from the investment of over £100 million on local road maintenance and small-scale transport schemes in West Sussex County Council up to 2021. In addition, the county benefits from access to £304 million-worth of local growth funding over the same period which has been secured by the Coast to Capital local enterprise partnership.

**Sir Nicholas Soames:** Mid Sussex is greatly looking forward to the Secretary of State's visit in early September to see the serious problems we have on the roads. Does the Minister agree that it is cardinally bad, rotten government to go on pushing housing into constituencies such as mine without investing in the infrastructure there in the first place? It is not a matter for West Sussex County Council; it is a matter for Mid Sussex District Council, which cannot go on accepting this volume of house building without a significant investment in dealing with these major bottlenecks on the roads.

**Jesse Norman:** My right hon. Friend has made his point eloquently. All I would say is that the major roads network that we announced last week, along with the bypass fund, is specifically designed to be part of a wider strategy whose purpose is to provide the infrastructure that new housing development requires. That should be part of the solution for any of these schemes.

**John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. This question has been narrowly confined to Mid Sussex, from which the right hon. Gentleman's Warley constituency is a considerable distance away. If he is going to focus his question exclusively on Mid Sussex, not "and elsewhere" or "and other places", we will hear him.

**John Spellar:** Will the Minister accept that the improvements to the road system to East Sussex—

**Sir Nicholas Soames:** Mid Sussex.

**John Spellar:** Mid Sussex. Does the Minister accept that the road system to Mid Sussex would be considerably improved if money was diverted from the ever-deepening, bottomless pit of HS2, thus enabling those projects to move forward much more quickly? May I join my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) in calling for a reassessment of this increasingly troubled scheme?

**Jesse Norman:** Mr Speaker, it is a mark of your grace that you were able to allow the right hon. Gentleman to proceed with a question so evidently unrelated to the issue, so much so that he was not able to make it to the actual name of the constituency or the area concerned, although that came in the first 10 seconds of his question.

The answer to his question, if I may dignify it with an answer, is that there will be plenty of investment in both sides of that equation.

**Mr Speaker:** Certainly I was generous, but generosity is my middle name.

### Ticketing Information

8. **Damien Moore** (Southport) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve ticketing information for rail passengers. [900458]

14. **James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to simplify ticketing information for rail passengers. [900464]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard):** Passengers are frustrated by the lack of information they get when choosing their ticket. The problems can be deep-rooted, but when I started as rail Minister I wanted to make rapid progress. I have been working with industry, the regulator and consumer groups, having launched an action plan on fares and ticketing. We are getting on with the job of delivering the many, many proposals contained therein.

**Damien Moore:** Does the Minister agree that if rail franchises do not adopt a more transparent ticket price system voluntarily, the Government should step in to ensure that rail passengers are offered the best value for money?

**Paul Maynard:** We certainly recognise that fares revenue is crucial to funding the day-to-day operation of the railway. I agree that all franchises should listen to passengers, and ensure that their fare structures are both fair and logical, as well as keenly priced, to support the many passengers who rely upon them.

**James Duddridge:** Southend has two train lines and multiple stations within the Southend boundary. Would it not be simpler if the same ticket could be used on both lines, which would be good for residents and visitors alike? It would clear things up for visitors, allowing them to do journeys into Southend and then pop in somewhere else on the way back to London.

**Paul Maynard:** I agree that Southend's beauties merit a journey by all passengers, wherever possible. We are seeing rapid technological change on the railway. The growth in smart ticketing and the various ticket media within a relatively short period will enhance the possibility for passengers to experience the flexibility to which my hon. Friend refers. I am looking forward to working with the industry on driving that technological change to make that vision a reality.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Transport Committee, Lilian Greenwood.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): The ticketing information in which passengers are most interested is the price. Since 2014, commuter rail fare increases have been capped to the retail prices index, but in an answer to me yesterday, the rail Minister said that that fares policy is "under review". Next month's

inflation figures will determine the cap for January 2018. If the Department reverts to the old formula, fares could rise by 5% or more, pricing many off the railways. Next week, when the Secretary of State announces his investment plans for control period 6, will he pledge that the improvements that passengers need will come at a price they can afford?

**Paul Maynard:** I suppose that I should start by welcoming the hon. Lady to her new position, although she has started to prognosticate already about what may or may not occur in the future. We have no intention of seeking to raise fares in the way that she describes, and it is not an appropriate path to go down. We always seek to put passengers first. We are continuing to maintain the cap at the moment, but we keep policies under review at all times. She should not read more into that than is actually there.

### Kettering Rail Bridge

9. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): If he will ensure that work to strengthen the Kettering rail bridge (a) starts and (b) is completed to schedule. [900459]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard):** Network Rail has announced that the A6013 Northampton Road, from Northfield Avenue mini roundabout to Lake Avenue, will be closed between 24 July 2017 and 4 Sep 2017. Network Rail is confident that the work will begin and finish as scheduled, and we are in regular contact with Network Rail in regard to this work.

**Mr Hollobone:** The Northampton Road railway bridge is located right next to the busiest road junction in Kettering town centre. The junction will be closed for six weeks and will cause major disruption to the town. The frustration of local residents will at least be partly assuaged if the Minister could reassure all of us who live in Kettering that he is at least actively considering proposals to reinstate the half-hourly mainline train service north from Kettering, which will go over the repaired bridge in the new franchise.

**Paul Maynard:** I recognise why my hon. Friend's constituents would have concerns, having seen a similar closure in my own constituency and the issues and problems that that has caused. I have also heard his observations and views on the extra services that he wishes to see from Kettering. We will shortly be launching a consultation on the new east midlands franchise and I am sure that his request will figure prominently in our thinking on what we do next on that franchise.

### Liquefied Natural Gas

10. **Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to promote the use of liquefied natural gas as an alternative to diesel fuel. [900460]

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** The low carbon truck trial, which ran to 2016, provided over £11 million to support industry-led trials of alternative fuels in the road freight sector, the majority of which involved liquefied natural gas.



**Mrs Hodgson:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Statebourne Cryogenics, based in my constituency, produces a world-first portable LNG refuelling station, which eliminates the release of methane into the atmosphere with significant cost reductions to the process. This is seen as an alternative to diesel for large HGVs, especially in the light of discussions around diesel pollution. Will the Minister commit to meeting me, Statebourne Cryogenics, and other partners in this project such as BOC and Calor Gas to discuss this matter further?

**Mr Hayes:** Well, the short answer is yes, but I do not want to give a short answer. Let me say this: the hon. Lady's constituency is a beacon for low emission vehicles of all kinds. I have visited the Nissan plant in her constituency, which builds the Nissan Leaf, but I feel that my visits to her constituency have been too few, so I will meet not only her, but representatives of the businesses that she describes to find out what more we can do.

**Mr Speaker:** It is obvious that the hon. Lady is in a state of quite overwhelming excitement at the prospect, as I am sure will be the people of her constituency—particularly those of them who know the right hon. Gentleman—when they realise that they are to be privileged with such a visit.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):** Especially if there is an unveiling to go with it.

#### Towed Trailers

12. **Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve the safety of towed trailers on roads. [900462]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):** I salute the hon. Lady for the work that she has done to raise the issue of towed trailer safety with my predecessor following the tragic death of Freddie Hussey. I very much look forward to meeting her to discuss this matter further on 19 July. As she will know, in November 2016, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency led a campaign about safety checks when towing trailers with the #TowSafe4Freddie. DVSA and stakeholders plan to relaunch the campaign this summer. The Government have also consulted about the law relating to causing death by careless and dangerous driving. I look forward to discussing all those issues when I meet her.

**Karin Smyth:** I welcome the Minister's comments and look forward to our meeting. I am grateful for the work of his predecessor, as are my constituents Scott and Donna Hussey, whose three-year-old son, Freddie, was killed by a loose trailer in 2014. Will the Minister offer his support to a new road safety initiative from the National Trailer and Towing Association that will see member organisations across the country offer free towing safety checks to members of the public?

**Jesse Norman:** I am absolutely delighted that the hon. Lady has mentioned this important initiative in the House and that the National Trailer and Towing Association has established the scheme. People can go to one of their participating service centres and get a

visual inspection or report on their trailers. This should make a difference in helping trailer owners to identify any defects and have them rectified. Not only do I welcome the initiative, but I welcome the fact that the association and other organisations are working closely with Government to improve the safety of towed vehicles.

#### Railways: Cheshire

13. **Ms Esther McVey** (Tatton) (Con): Whether he plans to expand the rail network in Cheshire. [900463]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard):** We are investing more than £1 billion in the great north rail project to transform rail travel for passengers across the north of England. In addition, we are supporting local enterprise partnerships and Transport for the North in progressing their priorities for investment in new stations and upgraded infrastructure.

**Ms McVey:** I am grateful to the Minister for his reply, and I want to impress on him the urgency of getting the mid-Cheshire rail link and the Manchester airport western link. Our population is expanding, businesses are increasing in size and the local plans will mean tens of thousands of new homes in the area. This cannot be catered for on the local roads and High Speed 2 will not be an answer. Will the Minister commit to support these schemes and come to meet me and the Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association?

**Paul Maynard:** First, let me welcome my right hon. Friend back to her place in this House. It is good to see her here again. As a regular commuter to school on the mid-Cheshire rail line, from Cuddington to Hale, I am all too aware of the attractions of reopening the line to Middlewich. I am more than happy to meet her and local campaigners, and it is really important that all local transport authorities and local enterprise partnerships are supportive of such projects. I am sure that in her early days as the Member for Tatton she will work with those groups to make this a reality.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): The Mersey-Dee Alliance, which includes the Cheshire West and Chester local authority, has a growth deal bid that includes rail improvements and the Chancellor indicated in his Budget that that might get some support. Can the Minister say whether any money has been given to the Department for Transport, in particular to improve the links between Crewe and Chester and on to north Wales?

**Paul Maynard:** We certainly recognise that our decision to take HS2 to Crewe by 2027 opened up a range of possibilities for improving connectivity into north Wales, considering the potential outcomes that passengers might want in terms of improved capacity, improved service frequency and so on. We are looking forward to doing more work on the Crewe hub and seeing what potential is unlocked by development at Crewe. Hopefully that will benefit not just Cheshire but north Wales.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): One pound is spent per person on transport infrastructure in Cheshire and the north-west for every £7 spent per person in London and the south-east. Can we have our extra £6 per person, please, to spend on things such as rail and road links to the port of Liverpool, which will help jobs and growth across the north-west?

**Paul Maynard:** We are always looking to ensure that we balance our investment across the country over time. I know that during my time on the Select Committee on Transport we looked very carefully at the relevant regional transport spending figures and what they do and do not tell us. We could have a very lengthy answer to this question, but that would displease you, Mr Speaker, so I point out once again the £1 billion investment across the north to improve rail infrastructure, including in the hon. Gentleman's area.

#### A27 Upgrade: Lancing to Worthing

15. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): When he plans to publish his proposals for the upgrade of the Lancing to Worthing section of the A27. [900466]

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** Departmental officials are in discussion with Nexus and the Tyne and Wear Metro regarding their proposals for new rolling stock.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman who asked the question is a dedicated Member, but he represents a constituency in Sussex.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman)** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Well done. I call Minister Jesse Norman.

**Jesse Norman:** We got there, Mr Speaker. The £15 billion road investment strategy, published in December 2014, announced a scheme to improve the Lancing to Worthing section of the A27. Highways England has developed proposals and a public consultation will run from 19 July to 12 September 2017. From 19 July, Highways England's website for the scheme will have key information about the proposals, including the brochure, online questionnaire, frequently asked questions, background reports and supporting information.

**Tim Loughton:** I am sorry to see that the Minister took the wrong turning, and I am pleased to see that, since I posed the question, we now have a timetable. The Minister knows how vital upgrading the A27 is to the whole of West Sussex, but there are serious concerns that the £80 million allocated to the Worthing-Lancing section—Worthing being a town of 100,000 people—will be inadequate compared with the £250 million to bypass Arundel, which has just 5,000 people. If the consultation shows that this is not satisfactory, will he, in order to come up with some really meaningful solutions, seriously consider looking at the more expensive options?

**Jesse Norman:** I am sure that my hon. Friend understands that we recognise the A27 as a strategically important corridor across the south coast, and we will look very closely at any further proposals that he wishes to make.

#### Topical Questions

T1. [900476] **Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): Número uno, Señor Presidente: if he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Just because the King of Spain visited yesterday and the hon. Gentleman felt it necessary to show off his language skills on that occasion, there was no need for him to do so again, but he obviously felt the need, and we have all seen what an edifying spectacle it was.

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** All three of us have taken part in business questions, so I am sure that you were not totally surprised by that contribution, Mr Speaker.

On a serious note, I pay great tribute to the officers of the British Transport police and the staff of Northern Rail for the way in which they responded to the bomb attack in Manchester. The rail staff in particular, whose job description that was in no way part of, responded heroically, and they deserve our thanks.

**Chris Bryant:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thought you might have picked something up from the Queen of Spain yesterday—[*Interruption.*] Some Spanish. I wholly concur with what the Secretary of State said about the staff in Manchester.

When the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness is upon us, may I urge the Secretary of State to come to the Rhondda to visit the Rhondda tunnel between Blaencwm and Blaengwynfi? That would be a magnificent tunnel if it were open for the public and cyclists to go through. It would be a great tourist attraction if only his Department would hand the project over to the local charity, and give it £250,000 as well.

**Chris Grayling:** I know that relations between the hon. Gentleman and the Labour party in south Wales can sometimes be slightly strained, but I am sure that he will use his influence on the Welsh Government, to whom we have offered to give the tunnel. They have not responded—I am waiting for their response—but it is there for them. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could encourage them to give us a response.

T3. [900478] **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): May I ask the Secretary of State to sit down with the West Yorkshire combined authority to ensure that the Shipley eastern bypass, which is badly needed by my constituents and the local economy, is actually delivered, and that neither can blame the other for a lack of progress on it?

**Chris Grayling:** I regularly meet the combined authority, so I will happily discuss that issue with it. The creation of the major roads network and its bypass fund will, I hope, mean that in future we can unlock some of these schemes that will make such a difference to towns like Shipley around the country.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Two weeks ago today, the High Court gave the Secretary of State 14 days to make a decision over Southern rail's claims that its appalling service was not its fault, but was all down to industrial action. With the record fine that has been imposed today, such nonsense has been totally blown out of the water. After months and months of the Secretary of State and his Ministers coming to the Dispatch Box and blaming the unions, they have had to come clean and accept that Southern rail is simply not

fit for purpose. Does the Secretary of State now accept that continuing to tolerate such ineptitude—expecting a rail service to rely on workers' overtime, and compromising safety and accessibility—simply will not wash any longer, and that he has to call time on Govia Thameslink Railway?

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman clearly still has not read the judgment from two weeks ago in this case—a case that we actually won. Let us be clear about what is being done today. For months I have said that the problems on this railway are not purely down to industrial action; there are other reasons. I am very clear, and so is Chris Gibb's report, that the prime responsibility for the trouble on that network in the past few months lies with trade unions fighting the battles of 30 years ago, and still they get support from the Labour party. The reality is that the Labour party and the unions are colluding to bring trouble to passengers, and it should stop.

**Andy McDonald** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before we proceed, may I say to the hon. Gentleman that his second question must be shorter? The right of Front Benchers to come in on topical questions is not sacrosanct. I have to cater to Back-Bench Members, and if Front Benchers take too long, I might reconsider the entitlement of Front Benchers to come in, trespassing on Back-Bench time. Please, a sentence. Be brief.

**Andy McDonald:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

We are missing appendix 9 from the Gibb report. Can we see it, and will the Secretary of State tell us which claims he accepts and which he rejects?

**Chris Grayling:** Today's penalty has been for partial non-performance of contracts. The House and the country would expect me to impose penalties where they are needed and I have not sought to do anything otherwise. The reality is that, this afternoon, we expect the result of a ballot for yet further strike action for a 23.8% pay rise and a deal that has already been accepted by the ASLEF union on the same routes for the same company. This politically motivated set of threats of action should stop, and the Labour party should stop supporting it.

T5. [900480] **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): For the first time in 45 years, there is a commercial rail service between Swanage and Wareham in my constituency, thanks to the dedication and hard work of the volunteers and members of Swanage Railway. What assurances can the rail Minister give that he will support our rail heritage and ensure that this trial becomes a permanent success?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard):** I am pleased to hear what is happening on Swanage Railway. I have met the all-party group on heritage rail, and it is always good to hear examples of where heritage rail can work with main line operators, although I agree that that has to be done safely. We are looking to build on more franchise agreements when there are sensible schemes that we can support.

T2. [900477] **Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Last year, Nexus published its ambitious plans to expand the Tyne and Wear Metro, which included a welcome reference to extending the metro to Washington in my constituency. Will the Minister assure me and my constituents that the Government will act to upgrade this crumbling 37-year-old network, and to ensure that the proposed extensions, such as that to Washington, go ahead?

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** The hon. Lady knows that the Government invest a great deal in the metro, and it is right that we should. Part of that is about improving the existing stations, ticketing and rolling stock. I understand her point about the extension of the metro. Perhaps she can articulate that, among the other things that we shall doubtless discuss, when I visit her constituency.

T6. [900481] **Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): Queuing traffic and air pollution are the public health concerns for those living and working in my constituency. The local economy continues to grow and thrive under this Government, but air pollution affects the maritime industry, especially at Hamble Lane, where queuing is a real problem. Will the Minister outline the commitment to fund bypasses in my constituency in order to tackle air pollution?

**Mr Hayes:** Was it not Hegel, Mr Speaker, who said that nothing worthwhile is ever achieved without passion? My hon. Friend is certainly a passionate advocate for this scheme, which is important to her constituents. It is also important to the port, which she champions as well. We will look at these matters closely because port connectivity is vital if we are to make our maritime future as glorious as our maritime past.

T4. [900479] **Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): Will the Minister say whether the new rolling stock for Merseytravel, HS2 and Crossrail will be procured using private or public finance, and why that is the case?

**Chris Grayling:** There has been a long tradition, under Governments of both parties, of a railway where we lease trains from the private sector. There have equally been occasions, as in the procurement of railway carriages for the east coast main line and the great western main line, when the Government have stepped in and taken that decision. We will have to look at which packages are available for those individual schemes. In the case of Merseytravel, the hon. Lady will have to talk to the Labour-controlled Merseyside councils.

**Mr Speaker:** It is very good of the new Chair of the Select Committee on Education to drop in on us; we are obliged to him.

T7. [900482] **James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): With Southend airport booming, there are great opportunities for associated business parks and businesses around that expanding airport. Will the Secretary of State agree to look at how we can expand business around successful regional airports?

**Chris Grayling:** It is really important that we make sure that our regional airports are successful. My hon. Friend and I visited Southend airport a few years ago. I was very impressed by what it has achieved and the way

in which it can be a driver of growth in the surrounding area. That applies across the whole country. It is one reason why the expansion of Heathrow is so important for regional airports further afield, and it is also why I hope that we will work together in a smart way to ensure that airports such as Southend flourish.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): We have had many flowery words from the Government about understanding the experience of our constituents in the north-east who are forced to use crumbling rolling stock on Tyne and Wear Metro, but flowery words will not get our constituents to work on time unless they are matched by investment. Will the Minister now commit to investing in our rolling stock from the public purse?

**Mr John Hayes:** The hon. Lady should know that investment is central to what we want to achieve. We are investing £370 million through an 11-year asset renewal programme. We are undertaking a major programme of track and infrastructure renewals. We are refurbishing most of the 90 vehicles, modernising 45 stations and introducing new smart ticketing. What is not to like about that?

T8. [900483] **Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Chelmsford is one of the busiest commuter stations in the country, but Chelmsford commuters have experienced frequent and significant delays. Will the Minister please provide an update on what actions are being taken to counter these delays?

**Paul Maynard:** I am sorry to hear of the delays that are being experienced by my hon. Friend's constituents. Clearly we have had a period of very hot weather, which does impact on rail reliability, and speed restrictions do help to protect overhead line equipment. I met the industry forums just this week to discuss what lessons can be learned about repeated periods of hot weather and how we can best protect critical infrastructure, and I hope the decisions they now move on to take can start to improve reliability.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): When the Chancellor came to Bristol in May, he refused to confirm whether electrification of the Great Western line into the city centre would go ahead. Will the Transport Secretary confirm whether it has been deferred, as we were told last year, or has it really been ditched?

**Chris Grayling:** As I said earlier, we are focused on delivering service improvements right now. The electrification process is continuing—there is no secret about the fact that this project has not gone as well as expected—but the key thing for the hon. Lady's constituents is that, from this autumn, there will be brand-new trains, more capacity, a better service and six trains an hour from Bristol to London. This is really good news for her constituents.

T9. [900484] **Ms Esther McVey** (Tatton) (Con): A number of my constituents are deeply concerned about the impact of High Speed 2—particularly residents in Ashley, who came to see me in a surgery last week. I am

sure that you, Mr Speaker, will be pleased that I am not going to go through every point they raised with me, but could the Minister meet me to go through every concern they had?

**Paul Maynard:** At the same time as we meet to discuss the mid-Cheshire line, I will be more than happy also to discuss some of the issues with the HS2 phase 2b route, which goes through my right hon. Friend's constituency.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): When the Conservative manifesto was published, there was no mention of Crossrail 2. Will the Minister tell us whether that was by accident or design? When does he plan to make a decision on the business case?

**Chris Grayling:** First, I absolutely support the need for the capacity improvements that Crossrail 2 will bring to London—indeed, not just to London, but to areas outside. We are working our way through the business case. I do not think it is any secret that the Transport for London funding package has not quite lived up to initial promises, but I want this to work. I am seeing the Mayor next week, and we will do everything we can to make it work.

**Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Belper, in my constituency, which is part of the world heritage site, is a great place to live, apart from the traffic? The A6 is far too clogged. Could we look at a bypass for Belper and at a new cycleway right up the Derwent valley?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):** Not only can we look at it, but we would be delighted to receive an application for a bypass. I look forward very much to cycling that section of the Derwent valley when I come to visit it on a future occasion.

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): The Transport Secretary is due to outline his plans for rail investment in the coming days. There is real concern that the promised electrification of the midland main line, which has the best business case, will be delayed again or dropped completely. Keeping promises is important. Will Ministers be keeping theirs?

**Chris Grayling:** The promise I will be keeping is on the services that people want. We will be delivering, by around 2020, the faster journey times to Sheffield and the capacity improvements that are needed to make this route fit for purpose for the next century.

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Will the Minister join me in congratulating Michelle and Mark Williams, who run the C&C taxi firm in St Austell? They have recently replaced all 14 of their diesel vehicles with electric vehicles. Theirs has been hailed as the greenest taxi firm in the country. Does he agree that more taxi firms should follow their example?

**Mr John Hayes:** Indeed. I have visited the new factory in Coventry that is building electric London cabs and the future is certainly for low-emission vehicles. That applies to vehicles that we might own, as well as to private hire vehicles and taxis. I certainly support what my hon. Friend suggests.

## Business of the House

10.30 am

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** The business for next week will be as follows:

**MONDAY 17 JULY**—Motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to international immunities and privileges, followed by general debate on the abuse and intimidation of candidates and the public during the general election campaign.

**TUESDAY 18 JULY**—General debate on drugs policy.

**WEDNESDAY 19 JULY**—General debate on exiting the European Union and sanctions.

**THURSDAY 20 JULY**—Motion relating to the appointment of a new Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, followed by general debate on matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment.

**FRIDAY 21 JULY**—The House will not be sitting.

Colleagues will also wish to be aware that, subject to the progress of business, the House will rise at the close of business on Tuesday 7 November and return on Monday 13 November; and for the Christmas recess, the House will rise at the end of business on Thursday 21 December and return on Monday 8 January 2018.

Finally, colleagues will also be pleased to know that the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill will be presented to the House today. As the Brexit Secretary has said, this is one of the most significant pieces of legislation that has ever passed through Parliament, and it is a major milestone in the process of our withdrawal. It means we will be able to exit the European Union with maximum certainty, continuity and control. That is what the British people voted for, and it is exactly what we will do.

**Valerie Vaz:** I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the—oh, do I call it business? I am not quite sure. Quite frankly, I and other Opposition Members are appalled, saddened and bewildered in equal measure. We have asked the good citizens of this country to vote for us, and they have. As we are in a parliamentary democracy, they have given their consent to be governed, to enable MPs to form a Government, pass legislation, and hold Ministers to account. We have not been allowed to do that. This is not the end of term where we have no lessons and a light timetable, or where we are spending our time singing or whistling; it is a time of critical importance to this country, and the clock is ticking. We have been back for 31 days and in that time we have had only seven votes. Calling it a “zombie Parliament” makes it sound amusing, but this is serious. It is a threat to our parliamentary democracy.

Why does it take a Standing Order No. 24 application, as we had on contaminated blood, before a debate is scheduled, and then a concession by the Government, immediately before the debate, on an inquiry? Statutory instruments on tuition fees and personal independence

payments were prayed against, and no debate was granted. Again last week, I raised the statutory instrument that enacts a 6.1% interest rate on university student loans, and asked for a debate. The Leader of the House said to one of her hon. Friends that

“the mood of many colleagues has been heard, and I am quite sure that the Department for Education is considering this matter.”—*[Official Report, 6 July 2017; Vol. 626, c. 1346.]*

Will she confirm when and how the Government will be considering the matter, and make a statement on these regulations, or at least give us time to debate it so that the Minister can come and explain why the most punitive interest rate is being applied to students?

To make matters worse, last week the same debate was scheduled on the Gibb report on two successive days until that was pointed out to the Government. This week, we also see two debates on the same subject—one in Westminster Hall yesterday, and then another on Monday, on the abuse and intimidation of candidates. While this is an important topic in the week that Viscount St Davids will be sentenced—we will hear today—on his abuse of Gina Miller, will the same debate be going ahead, or is it a mistake? Could we have an Opposition day on Monday instead?

The Leader of the House gave me no answer about whether there will be a summer Finance Bill. I do not know whether the Finance Bill will be in the autumn and the Budget will then be in the spring. Who knows, but it sounds to me like chaos, so can we have an answer?

Why has the Leader of the House not responded to requests for an Opposition day? The last one was on 23 February, granted to the Democratic Unionist party, but the official Opposition have not been granted one since January—to be precise, 25 January. Why no Opposition day? Why not let us debate and vote on an issue that is relevant to our constituents, who only a month ago told us what they thought? I thought the Leader of the House believed in sovereignty—that is what she campaigned on. The Opposition do, so let Parliament be sovereign and let us have a debate on a votable motion.

The Leader of the House said in June that the elongated Session would provide space to consider

“a domestic agenda which aims to tackle the social injustices in our country.”

So why has she allocated private Members’ Bill days for only one year of a two-year Session—13 dates? When will she say when the Opposition days will be for the first year of the Session, and when will we have the dates for the second year of the Session? Will she tell us her definition of what a Session is? If it is two years, we are therefore entitled to double the number of Opposition days.

On Tuesday, following the Taylor review, the Prime Minister said:

“We may not agree on everything, but through debate and discussion—the hallmarks of our Parliamentary democracy—ideas can be clarified and improved and a better way forward found.”

The Opposition agree, so why does the Prime Minister say that we need debate while Government representatives do everything they can to stifle debate? Is she an outsourced

[Valerie Vaz]

Prime Minister, completely detached from what is going on here? She can be heard in No. 10 singing the song “Heartbreaker”:

“Why do you have to be a heartbreaker,  
When I was bein’ what you want me to be?  
Suddenly everything I ever wanted has passed me by”.

I should have sung it rather than spoken it.

Finally, will you and the Leader of the House join me, Mr Deputy Speaker, in wishing everyone in the Black country a very happy Black Country Day? It is part of a month-long festival in Dudley, Walsall, Sandwell and Wolverhampton, and I invite everyone to come to Walsall.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I can certainly agree with the hon. Lady that that would probably be a more fun place to be today.

The hon. Lady raises some important points about our parliamentary democracy, but I find it deeply disappointing that the Opposition are trying to make something of what is an absolutely normal situation following a general election, when the Government of the day take steps to put Select Committees back in place, for instance. As she admits herself, the sitting days for private Members’ Bills are already on the Order Paper, and we are making progress. I congratulate all the Select Committee Chairs on their appointment yesterday, and the individual parties now need to get on with electing their Select Committee members, which they are doing at pace. The chiefs of the Opposition parties have been talking about Opposition days, and I gather that there has been an offer of an Opposition day in the next short sitting.

We are absolutely getting on with the business at pace and in accordance with normal procedures. I am left to conclude that this is just game playing by the Opposition. On the anniversary of her leadership of this country, the Prime Minister asked—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) is clearly not listening; she has other things to talk about. The Prime Minister asked all Members to come together in the interests of our country and give their ideas, input and support as we seek to fulfil the democratic will of the people in this country to leave the EU. What did the Opposition do? They ridiculed that. They absolutely reject the concept of working together in the interests of our country. Well, 13 million people voted for them, and they should support those people in their wish to see this country’s democratic will fulfilled.

**Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** Has my right hon. Friend seen my early-day motion 155, about the potential closure of London Road in Harlow?

[*That this House expresses concern over the decision taken by Harlow District Council to close London Road to motorists, restrict traffic with a bus gate and split the community in two; notes the record number of 409 objections to the planning application and 2,000-plus residents who have joined a protest group; understands that this road has been used as a primary route for residents to access health, educational and leisure services for over 20 years; and calls on the Government to investigate the decision that the local authority has taken to close this vital*

*connection and encourage Essex County Council to reject this Traffic Regulation Order from the planning decision.*]

The decision by Harlow Council will cause immense problems to Harlow residents and motorists. May we have a statement on unnecessary road closures, as Harlow Council seems to be ignoring the wishes of thousands of people who have voiced complaints and the record 409 objections to the planning application?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment as Chair of the Select Committee on Education. He will be as delighted as all Members should be that there are 1.8 million more children in good and outstanding schools than there were in 2010. That is something for his Committee to build on. He is exactly right to raise the frustrating issue for all our constituents of unnecessary road closures. I am sure that he will give it his full attention, as he does everything he turns his mind to.

**Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP):** I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. I join her in warmly congratulating my fellow Select Committee Chairs on their election yesterday. It is a great exercise in the democracy of this House, and we should be very proud of the way the Select Committees work, but we now need to get those Committees up and working. We need to get the membership of the Committees elected and we have one week in which to do it. Mr Speaker generously offered to facilitate with any issue, any party or any perceived blockage where he or the Deputy Speakers could help out. Did she take advantage of that generous opportunity? If not, why not?

We have passed one full piece of legislation through all stages of Parliament and two pieces on Second Reading, but we still have no Standing Committees in place. Will the Leader of the House endeavour to get this fixed before the zombies leave the building?

We have also not had a single debate about the perverse deal with the DUP, which has completely altered the usual funding allocations to the nations of the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister may have shed a tear on election night, but the DUP are marching all the way to the bank, rubbing their hands with glee. They will be back, demanding another few hundred million pounds, like an extortionist knows when he has someone in a vice-like grip in those sensitive places.

Hurray, the great repeal Bill will be out today, a Bill to unite the country in an invitation to climb aboard the battered jalopy as it trundles over the cliff edge. Apparently, Labour will oppose the Bill by defiantly agreeing with the Tory hard Brexit that will take us out of the single market and end freedom of movement. What opposition has been offered by the Labour party? In the meantime, we will continue to look after vital Scottish interests and fight for a place in the single market.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the membership of Select Committees. We want to get on with it, and on this side of the House we are getting on with selecting members. I hope that the hon. Gentleman’s democratic elections will be as clear as our own. I can assure him that through the usual channels an enormous amount of work is also going on to establish Standing Committees. No one

wants that to happen more than we do on the Government Benches. However, his remark about “zombies” is very rude to his colleagues—a few of them are still here today, and I thank them for turning up.

The hon. Gentleman talks about this Government not being democratically elected, but I remind him that we got 56 more seats than the official Opposition, which means that, in a democratic place such as this, we have the duty as well as the right to form a Government. I hope that he and his colleagues appreciate that fact.

It is a great shame that the hon. Gentleman talks constantly about wanting to stay in the single market, which he knows for a fact means not leaving the EU. In other words, he, for his own ends and those of his Scottish nationalist colleagues, would seek to undermine the will of the United Kingdom. That is totally undemocratic. Government Members and, I hope, Opposition Members will fulfil the will of the people.

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): Is the Leader of the House aware of concerns regarding challenges to the democratic system of government in Hong Kong? Some elected representatives there are being prevented from taking their seats in the legislature, and a recent statement from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the Sino-British joint declaration as “a historical document”, which

“no longer has any practical significance”.

This month marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Hong Kong as a special administrative region on the principle of “one country, two systems”, so will she consider a debate in Government time about this concerning issue?

**Andrea Leadsom**: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point. The Minister for Asia and the Pacific met the Chinese ambassador on 5 July, when he stressed the UK’s strong commitment to the Sino-British joint declaration—a legally binding treaty, registered with the UN, which continues to be in force. As co-signatory to the joint declaration, the UK will continue to stress to the Chinese Government the need to implement faithfully the one country, two systems arrangement.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): We do not yet know the allocation that the Government have determined for the Backbench Business Committee in this Session. We hope that the 27 days allocated in a normal Session will be doubled to 54 in this two-year Session.

Will the Leader of the House try to facilitate deciding the membership of the Backbench Business Committee quicker than that of the other Select Committees? The Backbench Business Committee is not a normal Select Committee; it is here to determine the Chamber’s business.

**Andrea Leadsom**: First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his reappointment as Chairman. He did a great job in the previous Parliament and I am sure he will do so again. I am also sure that he recognises that we have tried to bring forward some of the carry-over requests from the previous Parliament for debates. As with Opposition days, the allocation of Backbench Business days is set out in Standing Orders. However, it has been the custom in longer-than-usual Sessions to offer additional days and we fully intend to do the same. More will be said about that in due course.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle)**: I call “Our Man in Havana”—Alec Shelbrooke.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. In the previous Parliament, I introduced a private Member’s Bill to ban unpaid internships. The Matthew Taylor report outlined this week that they are indeed damaging to social mobility and an abuse of power by employers. May we have a debate in this Chamber on all aspects of the Matthew Taylor report? For all the crowing on the other side, no Opposition Member bothered to turn up to debate the private Member’s Bill.

**Andrea Leadsom**: My hon. Friend has really pushed this issue and he is right to do so. It is of great interest to the House, even when Opposition Members do not bother to turn up to support a Bill on it. The Government’s position is clear: employing unpaid interns as workers to avoid paying the national minimum wage or the national living wage is illegal, exploitative and represents a real barrier to social mobility by squeezing out candidates from less wealthy backgrounds.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): Last week, I visited Shelley College, an outstanding-rated school in my constituency, where staff explained that the budget had already been cut to the bone. Every school in my constituency faces further cuts. May we have a debate on the Government’s worrying plan to cut funding for local schools?

**Andrea Leadsom**: The hon. Lady will know that the Government have protected cash spending on schools and we have created many thousands of new school places to meet demand. There has been a great deal of investment in the fabric of buildings. We fully appreciate that schools are under pressure. The hon. Lady will also know that we have accepted the recommendation of the independent schools’ pay body and we will do everything we can to ensure that, as I said earlier, the number of children who are in good and outstanding schools—1.8 million more than in 2010—increases and that we do more than ever particularly to help disadvantaged pupils.

**Mr Deputy Speaker**: I call Mike Penning.

**Hon. Members**: Hear, hear.

**Mike Penning** (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): It has been a long time since I asked a question on health from the Back Benches. I am sure that the Leader of the House knows that Hemel Hempstead is the largest town in Hertfordshire, but that in 2006—we know which Government were in power—the acute services at Hemel Hempstead Hospital were closed. We now have clinical commissioning groups, but they seem to be completely unaccountable. The CCG for our part of the world costs £10 million a year and it has just rubber-stamped more closures at Hemel Hempstead Hospital. May we have a debate on the power of CCGs and their accountability—or lack of it?

**Andrea Leadsom**: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. Many colleagues from all parties are concerned about what happens to hospitals in their

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areas. My right hon. Friend will know that there are clear rules about accountability and consultation with patients and that, of course, any decisions should be led by clinicians in consultation with users of the service. He makes an important point and he may well wish to raise it in Westminster Hall or in an Adjournment debate.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Yesterday, during the debate on the tragic events at Grenfell Tower, the Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma), was asked whether local authorities—such as Coventry, for example—would be helped to introduce safety measures. He said that the Government would help with the process. In view of the number of cuts that the Government have inflicted on local authorities over the last seven years, may we have a statement to clarify what help local authorities will actually be given?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Grenfell Tower is one of the most appalling disasters that the country has ever faced. We will all continue to be absolutely focused and determined to get to the bottom of what caused it, and the top priority is to try to help the people who have suffered so terribly. At the same time—as the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government have made clear—we want to take steps to ensure that such a disaster cannot happen again, which will include requiring other local authorities to check what fire regulations and what sort of cladding their areas have and what other risks are being faced. The Government are giving as much support as possible to that process.

**Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): The public consultation on the future of the children's congenital heart disease service at Royal Brompton Hospital will close on Monday. If the proposals from NHS England are implemented, all CHD services at the hospital will be closed, including the adult research centre, the children's intensive care unit, and specialist children's respiratory services for conditions such as cystic fibrosis, asthma and muscular dystrophy. Will a Minister come to the Dispatch Box to explain how those services will be provided for my constituents and others in the south-east and London if the proposals go ahead?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend has raised a very important point, which I know is of huge interest throughout the House. No final decisions have been made, and there is no plan to close the Royal Brompton as a provider of CHD services. NHS England is currently conducting a review of congenital heart services across the country before finally deciding on and implementing any change. Let me make it clear that the review is not about cutting services or costs, but about ensuring that patients have the very highest standard of care now and in the future, regardless of where they live or which hospital provides that care.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Given the mess that the United Kingdom Government are making of the economy and Brexit, and given how

successful the Scottish Government have been with their recent economic measures, will the Leader of the House agree to a debate on devolving further fiscal responsibilities to Scotland?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I think it behoves the hon. Lady to look very carefully at what the Scottish Government are doing now. Their track record of managing their current devolved powers leaves something to be desired.

The hon. Lady says that the UK Government are not doing well with EU withdrawal. I beg to differ from her completely. Today we are introducing the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, which seeks to implement the will of the people. The Scottish National party clearly does not care about the will of the people. The Scottish people decided that they wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom, but, rather than trying to get on with the day job, SNP Members focus entirely on who makes the decisions to which the hon. Lady has referred. That is not a democratic approach.

**Ms Esther McVey** (Tatton) (Con): Alderley Park in my constituency is the largest bio-centre in the United Kingdom. It is a true world leader, and it is currently undergoing a 10-year transformation. Will the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy make a statement on the country's industrial strategy and how Alderley Park fits into it? [*Interruption.*]

**Andrea Leadsom:** Is it not interesting that Opposition Members are just chuntering? That is because they are not interested in the strength of our economy.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on one of her first interventions since she retook her seat, and I welcome her back to this place. We should be talking about jobs, economic growth and areas in which the UK can lead the world. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will be keen to talk about the Government's industrial strategy. We are determined to ensure that it means that we have the high-skilled, highly paid jobs of the future, throughout the United Kingdom.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The previous chief executive at Hull Royal Infirmary left having put the hospital into a terrible state. He moved to another hospital, which subsequently moved into special measures. During that time, he was investigated by NHS Protect, the anti-fraud body of the NHS. I understand that he has now retired and set up a consultancy to offer his services to the NHS. Can we have a debate on the revolving door of failed NHS managers and their role in the NHS?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises what sounds like an extremely concerning issue regarding one individual, and the bigger issue of the revolving door of people who have failed in one job and move on to another one, often at significant expense to the taxpayer. She will be aware that there have been a number of Public Accounts Committee reports on that issue, but she may want to raise it herself through a Westminster Hall debate.

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): The Leader of the House will be aware of the looming crisis involving the amount of plastic entering our seas and oceans. We are quickly getting to the point where there



will be more plastic than fish in the sea. In the light of that, I warmly welcomed the comment by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that the Government are now considering introducing a plastic bottle deposit return scheme, but can we have a statement from the Secretary of State, so we can discuss and indeed promote that scheme in the Chamber?

**Andrea Leadsom:** As my hon. Friend will know, I am passionately concerned about that issue. I was delighted with the results of the consultation on the banning of microbeads in face wash and other products and with the results of our litter strategy, which looks at what else we can do to eradicate plastics from our oceans. Eighty per cent. of the plastics that end up in the ocean come from the land, and it is important that we deal with litter on the land as well. I am sure that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be keen to do just that, and that he will come to the House in due course when he has something clear to say.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): Can we have an urgent debate on the role and remit of the Homes and Communities Agency? I have two businesses under threat of closure after the HCA triggered break clauses in their leases. The HCA has also damaged communities in east Durham, notably in Horden, through its failure to act after the Accent housing association disposed of its housing stock. Will the Government take control of that public body, which has delivered little benefit and caused no end of misery in areas such as east Durham?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Again, the hon. Gentleman raises what sounds like an important and serious issue. I am sure that he will want to raise it directly with the Secretary of State, or perhaps at oral questions, to ensure that a spotlight is shone on the issue.

**Ms Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): Mr Deputy Speaker, you look like a gentleman who enjoys a glass or two of English sparkling wine. *[Interruption.]* Forgive me. I invite you and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to tour the many vineyards in my constituency, including the Fox & Fox and the Bluebell vineyards—award-winning vineyards supporting jobs and the local economy. Can we have a debate on the best of British produce, including English sparkling wine, and how we can best promote it in new markets and harness the opportunity of Brexit?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I can tell my hon. Friend that I have only ever seen Mr Deputy Speaker have a cup of tea and a Chorley cake. Isn't that right, Mr Deputy Speaker? She raises an important point. English sparkling wine is taking the world by storm. We are winning prizes and competing with famous brands. She is right to raise that valuable and growing sector and I would be delighted to take her up on her offer.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I can assure you that Mrs Hoyle will be the one who will come.

**Sir Kevin Barron** (Rother Valley) (Lab): Can the Leader of the House arrange an emergency debate on the re-routing of HS2 in South Yorkshire? At the HS2 briefing for Members last night, the chairman of HS2 said that the reason it is not in favour of the Sheffield

Meadowhall station is the lack of backing by Sheffield City Council and the Sheffield chamber of commerce, blatantly ignoring the wishes of the other three councils in South Yorkshire. Can we have an urgent debate on those matters?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The right hon. Gentleman will know that there has been wide consultation on the routes for HS2, as I discovered during phase 1, which has now received Royal Assent, so there have been and will continue to be many opportunities for consultation. I urge him to take every opportunity to feed in to the process as early as he can.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate on sharp practices by private car parking companies? Smart Parking has taken over the car park behind the Co-op in Saltaire and has changed the rules so that people have to get a ticket for the first 20 minutes of their stay even though it is free, when previously they did not, and with very minimal and inadequate signage, and it then introduced draconian fines of £100 for anybody who does not meet that new requirement. This is not only ripping off its customers and my constituents, but is having a terrible effect on local businesses in the area. May we have a debate so that we can stop some of these practices of rogue companies such as Smart Parking?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sure all Members will share my hon. Friend's disgust at some of the activities of rogue and unfair private parking operators, and he will be pleased to know that the Government have taken steps to tackle this, including the banning of wheel-clamping and towing. Consumer protection regulations have also been amended to make it simpler and clearer for consumers to bring their own actions to seek compensation when they have been the victims of misleading or aggressive debt collection practices, but I do think this is an area that we will come back to.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): The Leader of the House says that the business she has announced for next week is business as normal, but it certainly is not. Normal business in this Parliament is when Select Committees are able to meet and are able to quiz Ministers, when every second sitting week includes an Opposition day debate on a votable motion, and when there is a Backbench Business debate every sitting week, but she is not allowing any of that. Will not voters start to conclude that this Government are absolutely terrified of the House? Since she has congratulated the new Select Committee Chairs, will she at least guarantee that they can actually chair a Committee because they will be able to sit by next Thursday?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman is talking about what are routine measures after a general election to re-establish the Select Committees. If he looks back through history, he will see that we are moving exactly as quickly as any other new Government. We are trying to establish these Committees as quickly as we can. He says we are not discussing anything of any value; I think he must agree that we had the Grenfell Tower debate, and there is the issue of abuse and intimidation of parliamentary candidates, which is damaging—*[Interruption.]* He is not listening to the answer; he is not interested in the answer. *[Interruption.]* So, he is

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saying that discussing abuse and intimidation of candidates, which is clearly putting people off actually standing—*[Interruption.]* He will appreciate that not nearly enough time and effort has been given to what is a very significant matter. *[Interruption.]* He waves his hand; people have had death threats and people are being put off from standing for Parliament—*[Interruption.]* So he does not care about that. Next week on the Order Paper are very important—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I do not think that is the case; I think every Member cares about every other Member here—let us be clear about that.

**Julia Dockerill** (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): The Metropolitan police recently revealed that up to 50,000 crimes a year are now being committed by thieves on motorbikes and pedal cycles. That is reflected in correspondence I receive from my constituents across Hornchurch and Upminster. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on whether police have all the powers they need to tackle this alarming new crime wave?

**Andrea Leadsom:** May I start by welcoming my hon. Friend to her place? I can confirm that the Home Office is currently in discussion with the Metropolitan police about the problem of motorcycle and moped theft in London and will look very carefully at the evidence on what more can be done to prevent it. Of course, how the police enforce the law and deploy available resources is the responsibility of individual chief officers, taking into account specific local problems and the demands they are faced with.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): On Tuesday, the Foreign Secretary told this House that the UK Government will

“work closely under the Joint Ministerial Committee to bring in the devolved Administrations and make sure the great deal we are going to get has their endorsement and approval.”—*[Official Report, 11 July 2017; Vol. 627, c. 139.]*

The truth is that the JMC plenary last met in January, the JMC Ministers last met in February and there was no JMC agreement on triggering article 50 before the Prime Minister triggered it. Indeed, since the election no meeting date has yet been set with the Welsh and Scottish Governments. May we have an urgent statement from the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union on the JMC and its role in the process of the UK exiting the EU?

**Andrea Leadsom:** As many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have made clear, it is fully the intention to consult widely on all matters regarding devolution, and those conversations have indeed taken place before. It has been made clear that no powers that currently reside in the devolved Administrations are to be withdrawn, and that there will be further opportunities for devolution. The hon. Gentleman is focusing on process, and I am trying to explain that we are absolutely attending to process but what is important is the intention of this Government, which is to consult widely and to seek the agreement of all colleagues across the House as we fulfil the will of the people of the United Kingdom.

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Could my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the laws relating to the unauthorised arrival of travelling people in parks and open spaces? Only last week, a group of very hostile people arrived in a local park and caused much damage to play equipment, not to mention the cost to the council officers and police who had to remove them.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises an important point, and I am aware that this is a matter of interest to Members on both sides of the House who understand the frustration when Travellers arrive on unauthorised land and cause damage and upset to local communities. I can tell him that local authorities and the police have a wide range of strong powers that enable them to take action, and the Government really want to see them working together to address this issue.

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): Please allow me to refresh the Leader of the House’s memory. It was on 25 January this year that we last had an Opposition day debate. She referred earlier to Opposition Members needing to represent our constituents, and we wish to do so. Why will she not commit right now to granting Opposition day debates and to correctly doubling the number of Back-Bench business debates? Why not?

**Andrea Leadsom:** As I mentioned earlier, an Opposition day has been proposed for the next short session of Parliament, and that is going through the usual channels—*[Interruption.]* As a matter of convention, those things go through the usual channels. The Standing Orders set out the number of Opposition days and Back-Bench days. It is also the convention in a longer than usual Session to offer more such days, and it is our intention to do exactly that. It is absolutely the case that we will set up the Committees as soon as possible, as has happened before, and offer more Back-Bench and Opposition days than would normally be allocated through Standing Orders. I genuinely do not see why the Opposition are making such a big fuss about this. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): In the agreement made with the Democratic Unionist party, the Government generously and wisely offered a detailed study into the benefits of lower VAT for the tourism industry. May we have a statement or a debate in Government time on the benefits of such a study elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and potentially in coastal communities such as the Isle of Wight, and more generally on measures to support coastal tourism in the UK? May I recommend the Isle of Wight, not least because it has the highest rates of sunshine in the United Kingdom? Half our GDP comes from tourism, and it is a self-contained area that would greatly benefit from such a study into lower VAT on tourism.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He will obviously be a strong advocate for the Isle of Wight, and I am sure that all hon. Members will be keen to go there just as soon as their summer recess plans permit. He has campaigned on the issue of tourism, which is vital for the economy of the Isle of Wight, and I completely understand his desire for more effort to be made for coastal communities. That is shared by this Government and he might wish to apply for an Adjournment or Westminster Hall debate in which to put forward his suggestions.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): When can the House express its disdain and contempt for the rip-off decision made by a gullible Government in agreeing to buy the dearest electricity in the world from a French company and guaranteeing that price for 35 years? Only months after starting out, the project is £1.5 billion over budget and a year behind schedule. Like all other European pressurised reactors—EPRs—this one will involve vast cost overruns and long delays, and none of them has ever produced enough electricity to light a bicycle lamp. May we debate this, to address the continuing rip-off of the taxpayer for the next 50 years?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I have the greatest respect for the hon. Gentleman, who has been an anti-nuclear campaigner for a long time. I respectfully say, as an ex-Energy Minister, that I just disagree with him. On average, nuclear energy provides around 20% of our electricity needs at all times, and our ageing fleet of nuclear power stations must be replaced. If we want to continue to keep the lights on, we have to take steps. This particular project protects taxpayers from the costs of budget overruns.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): As I understand it, the Government will deposit the High Speed 2 phase 2a Bill on Monday next week. According to parliamentary procedures, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) and I understand them, that leaves only 56 days of consultation over the summer holidays and summer recess, which is simply not enough. Will my right hon. Friend consider extending the period for six weeks or delaying the deposit of the Bill until we return in September?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend that consultation is important, and I will certainly take up this issue with the Secretary of State for Transport.

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): The Leader of the House has been asked several times about having an Opposition day debate so that we can represent our constituents. I want to ask her a simple question to which she may answer yes or no: can we have an Opposition day debate next week?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady will be aware that the business for next week has already been announced.

**Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): The exploitation of leasehold agreements by house builders and management companies is a national scandal that is leaving homeowners in my constituency in financial difficulty. May we have an urgent debate to explore an industry-wide solution to address the actions of such companies across the board?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is right to raise that important issue. The Government are working with partners who have an interest in reforming residential leasehold, as outlined in our housing White Paper, to try to improve fairness and transparency for leaseholders. The White Paper responded to leaseholders' concerns that were raised by MPs in a debate on reforming leasehold in December 2016, and we will be consulting on what more needs to be done to promote greater transparency and fairness for leaseholders, including

whether all developers and managing agents are acting in the best interests of those thinking of buying and living in a leasehold property.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): On 25 July, we mark 18 years of brutality against Falun Gong practitioners in China. So many families have been destroyed and so many people have lost their lives for their faith in Falun Gong's guiding principles of truthfulness, compassion and tolerance. Despite all its resources and the inside knowledge, China has not provided any information to show that the forced organ harvesting of prisoners of conscience is not happening. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement or, better still, a debate on this important issue?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a harrowing issue, which many hon. Members across the House will have been made aware of. It is certainly something that he should raise at Foreign Office questions, and it would also be worthy of debate either on the Adjournment or in Westminster Hall.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): I do not know whether my right hon. Friend has had enough time to look at my blog today. More's the pity if not, but if she has, she will have been concerned to see that Taunton Deane has built up a secret land bank of houses with a nod and a wink from the leader of the council. Many millions of pounds are involved, and it smells and looks like corruption on an enormous scale. Before things get out of hand, please may we have time for a debate to discuss the matter, and to consider local government and how planning authorities are working in this country?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend knows that I spend most mornings doing nothing but read his blog. He raises a serious issue that I am sure he will want to take up directly with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): May we have a debate on the National Audit Office's damning report on the closure of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs offices, such as the one in my constituency? I received a letter from the Chancellor just yesterday, confirming that a decision about committing public funds was made during the election period, which looks very much like a breach of the ministerial code. This Parliament must have the opportunity to scrutinise such things properly before decisions are made.

**Andrea Leadsom:** As the hon. Lady knows, the consultation took place over a long period of time, and the decision on the closure was not contrary to the ministerial code. She will also be aware that, as we discussed last week, the decisions on closures have been taken to try to maximise the best use of taxpayer resources. More coaches are being provided to try to help people get back into work, and costs of travel are being accommodated where it can be shown to be further than would be reasonably expected.

**Chris Williamson** (Derby North) (Lab): May we have a debate in Government time on the activities of rogue debt management companies such as Compass Debt

[Chris Williamson]

Counsellors? The company operated in my constituency and went into liquidation last year, owing 1,700 people a total of £5.5 million after it emptied the coffers year on year, taking out hundreds of thousands of pounds. Is it not time that this kind of spivvery was outlawed once and for all?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am incredibly sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's point. There have been some pretty awful examples of the behaviour of debt management companies. I am not familiar with the specific case, but I encourage him to take it up with the Financial Conduct Authority, which has responsibility for looking at some of these issues.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): One of the many casualties of the recent general election has been the Government's consultation on sentences and penalties for those causing death by dangerous driving. The consultation finished on 1 February 2017, and my attempts to find out the results have been met with evasive non-answers. May we have a statement on the progress of that consultation?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises an important point, and I will certainly look into it. If I may, I will write with any information I am able to give her.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): On a similar point to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell), three weeks ago I raised the issue of HMRC office contracts being signed during purdah. The Leader of the House received a letter from me, but I have not had a response. The Chancellor was asked this question two weeks ago, and he has not responded to me either. May I press upon the Leader of the House the urgency of having a debate or a statement—preferably a debate—on the issue, which affects all nations and regions of the United Kingdom, of why this Government negotiated contracts during purdah when, at the general election, four political parties opposed HMRC office closures?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that he has written to me and not had a reply?

**Chris Stephens** *indicated assent.*

**Andrea Leadsom:** I apologise for that. I have not seen his letter, but I can assure him that I will always try to reply within a week to any hon. Member who writes to me. I reassure him that I specifically checked, and there was no breaking of the ministerial code. I cannot find the note in my folder giving the precise detail, but I am aware that the consultation took place over a much longer period of time. In order to protect against some quite significant costs, the decision was taken to announce the decision to close during purdah, but that was not in breach of the ministerial code. He will forgive me for not having the precise detail, but I will certainly write to him with it.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): This weekend, at Pontypool Park in my constituency, many of my constituents will take part in the 24-hour Cancer Research

UK relay for life, not only to raise funds but to show solidarity with families touched by cancer. May we have a debate on the contribution that our communities can make to supporting families blighted by this terrible disease?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a point that all hon. Members will be keen to support. Every one of us knows or is close to someone who has been touched by cancer, which is a frightening and horrible disease. It is fantastic to see the work of so many volunteers to try to contribute to research, so that we can get on top of cancer and find ways to cure every aspect of it. I congratulate his constituents on their efforts and I hope they enjoy their relay.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House will be aware of the terrible neglect, which has proved a national scandal, at South Lakes safari zoo. May we have a debate—a debate was in train before the snap election was called—on the lamentably inadequate national regulation? Many senior members of the organisation team that was in charge while the neglect was happening have had to be granted a new licence simply because they changed the guy at the top.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I recall the South Lakes zoo case that the hon. Gentleman mentions from my time as Environment Secretary, and we were all very concerned about it. It would certainly be worth his while trying to obtain an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate to raise the issue. As I recall it, the real challenge is enforcement, not the rules being inadequate, but this may be well be something worth debating to try to ensure that we get to the bottom of it.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Last week, Barclays bank announced the closure of its branch in Neston, following which there will be no high street banks left in the town. May we therefore have a debate on how we can prevent communities being isolated in this way, and on what more can be done to ensure that banks are more responsible to the communities they are meant to serve?

**Andrea Leadsom:** This has been an issue right across the UK. The Post Office has really stepped up to the plate and I believe it now offers basic banking services for all the main UK banks and certainly for Barclays. The flexibility of post office opening hours means that many constituents can get better banking services. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman raises this issue, because one of the biggest challenges is making people aware of that fact. He knows that the banks have an agreed consultation process before they decide to close. Nevertheless, I urge him to look at the prospects for post offices stepping into the gap.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): By September, we will not have had an Opposition day debate for a staggering seven and a half months. In the interim, may we have a debate in Government time, because I, for one, want to debate the capped expenditure process, which will lead to massive cuts in York's already underfunded NHS?

**Andrea Leadsom:** This is obviously the subject of the day for Labour Members. I have explained several times that we are making efforts to deal with all of these normal things: the re-establishment of Committees, the dates for Opposition day debates and so on. The hon. Lady will be well aware that next Thursday there is a pre-recess Adjournment debate, where she will have the opportunity to raise the specifics of the NHS in her constituency, for which I know she is a great advocate. I urge colleagues right across the House to try to understand that this is normal following a general election, and we need to focus on working together to try to deliver for the people of this country.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Last week, in a very animated response to a question from me, the Leader of the House advised that the Secretary of State for Scotland spent

“hours and hours of committed time”

on

“the discussion of a package of fiscal reliefs to support the oil and gas sector”.

The reliefs that came through were welcome. She continued by saying that,

“he spent hours with me working on a supply chain”.

But she omitted to say that the oil and gas sector is still awaiting action on late-life asset transfers and loan guarantees promised in 2016. I want the Secretary of State for Scotland not to spend hours on these matters, but to spend days, weeks and months, if necessary, to get Government action. Will the Leader of the House therefore advise on what discussions the Secretary of State had with her in her role as Minister in this area? She concluded her answer last week by saying that he has always

“spoken up for the people of Scotland at every opportunity.”—[*Official Report*, 6 July 2017; Vol. 626, c. 1354.]

Will she therefore explain why he always avoids answering my questions on the discussions he has had with the relevant Departments? Will she speak to him about that, and will she once again list his achievements for Scotland?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I cannot possibly explain to him why the Secretary of State for Scotland thinks something or does something; I am sure he will realise that that is not a question for me. However, I am extremely pleased that the hon. Gentleman now acknowledges what I did say in some spirited fashion last week, which was that I absolutely recall the Secretary of State for Scotland standing up for Scottish people on protecting and promoting the oil and gas sector—he continues to do that. If the hon. Gentleman would like to talk to him about it, I am sure he will be able to speak for himself about exactly where he is on his support for the people of Scotland.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I am lucky in my constituency to take part in parkrun on a Saturday morning; hundreds of local people now run regularly because the Parc Bryn Bach athletics club has its own Couch to 5k programme. May we have a statement on promoting physical activity and improving public health? Finally, why will the Government not give us our fair share of Opposition day debates for the next two years?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his evident fitness and healthy approach to life. I hope that that will extend to his approach to the work in this Chamber over the next few years. It is absolutely vital that we do more to promote a healthy lifestyle. This Government have put a great deal of money into new cycling programmes, new sports for children in schools and so on, but I must also mention all the work that volunteers do to develop these programmes for running together through the park. It is a lovely thing to do and it also adds to the health of the nation, so I congratulate him on that.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): May we have an early debate on this week’s report by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration on the failure of the Border Force to monitor properly small ports for immigration, smuggling and illegal migration issues—issues that were raised by me 18 months ago in parliamentary questions in this House. Perhaps it is the sort of issue that we could have an Opposition day debate on if we were granted one.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The problem is that, by the time we get to an Opposition day, there will be about 20 different subjects, and no one will agree on what exactly they want to debate. Let us get away from the process, and focus instead on the important subjects. The right hon. Gentleman does raise an important subject and I am quite sure that he will want to put in for an Adjournment debate so that he can discuss that very report.

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Manchester Royal Infirmary has had to stop congenital heart surgery because staff have been leaving following the uncertainty caused by the review which the right hon. Lady referred to earlier. Patients now have to travel up to 150 miles for treatment. May we have a statement on how we can continue to deliver local congenital heart services to those patients in advance of the review?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. As I said earlier, NHS England is running a review of congenital heart services across the country before finally deciding on and implementing any change. This review is not about cutting services or costs, but about ensuring that patients have the very highest standards of care. He will appreciate, as will all hon. Members, that as improvements in medical technology and medical capabilities continue, we will need to look at the best delivery to give every child and adult the best outcomes that we can.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): May we have a debate in Government time on income inequality, because research from the Resolution Foundation shows that, for the decade to 2020, we have had the lowest wage growth in 210 years? In that debate, may we also look at the contract-cutting wage promoted by Her Majesty’s Government that discriminates against the under-25s?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Youth unemployment in this country has dropped dramatically since 2010. It has been one of the enormous achievements in this country. Another enormous achievement has been the number of new apprenticeships that have been taken up. A third

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achievement of this Government has been the number of disadvantaged 18-year-olds going into higher education. We have a very strong, positive track record for what we are doing for the under-25s. There is still much more to do, but in terms of getting them into work, into apprenticeships and into higher education, we have a good track record.

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): The planned closure and relocation of Department for Work and Pensions offices will have a major negative impact on the local economy of towns such as Merthyr Tydfil in my constituency as well as many others across the country. It will also cause major travel difficulties for employees with caring responsibilities. May I ask the Leader of the House to urge the Secretary of State to carry out a full impact assessment and bring the results of that assessment, together with the results of any consultation, to the House as soon as possible—perhaps for an Opposition day debate?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman knows that, in looking at maximising the value for taxpayers from managing the estate, any Government Department will always look at ensuring that access is good enough and that the service is at least as good as it was previously. He will also appreciate that we need to live within our means. We have taken huge steps to getting back to a position in which we spend only what we take instead of adding to the debt and deficit that was left by the last Labour Government. It is vital that, where we can, we seize the opportunities to get better value for the taxpayer out of our Government estate.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): May we have a debate on the future of Durham Tees Valley airport, the promise made by the Tees Valley Mayor to buy it, and the Government's position on whether his nationalisation plans will be funded from the public purse?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I think we all welcome additional air travel opportunities, and this sounds to me like an ideal opportunity for an Adjournment debate.

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): As we rapidly approach summer and our thoughts turn

to holidays, many of our constituents might need to send money abroad. May we have a statement from Ministers on the payment services regulations and the results of the Government's recent research on transparency and consumer decisions on foreign exchange transactions?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the very important issue of people going on holiday. I wish everybody who is about to embark on their holidays, including those in this place, a good time. He should probably raise his specific point during oral questions, as I am not sure that he has given me enough information to respond with exactly what he is after.

**Valerie Vaz:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Let me just clear something up. Normally, points of order would come after a statement, but if this is a special point of order on a point of clarification and is relevant to business questions I will take it now.

**Valerie Vaz:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I, through you, ask the Leader of the House to clarify whether she announced new business in the form of an Opposition day in the short sitting in September, and if so, on what date that will be?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Does the Leader of the House want to respond?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. What I said to the House is that through the usual channels I am aware that an Opposition day debate is being offered during that short sitting in September.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Can you clarify that there is a means by which the Leader of the House can correct the record? She has suggested today that it is utterly normal for us not to have Opposition day debates at this stage, but in fact in 2015, by the summer recess after the general election, we had already had five—

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. We are not opening up the debate. The question has been dealt with and we will now move on.

## Counter-Daesh Update

11.32 am

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon):** With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to update the House on the counter-Daesh campaign in Iraq and Syria and the UK's involvement in this collective effort by some 68 coalition nations as well as the Arab League, Interpol, the European Union and NATO.

On Monday, three years after Daesh leader al-Baghdadi declared his so-called caliphate at the al-Nuri mosque in Mosul, Prime Minister Abadi declared victory in Mosul. It was an important moment. Today, Daesh's black flags no longer fly. Its fighters are dead or fleeing, and only very small pockets of resistance remain in west Mosul. I am sure that the whole House will join me in praising those involved in the operation. Over the past nine months, Iraqi security forces, including the Kurdish peshmerga, have fought in incredibly challenging conditions to root out a callous enemy. Over 1,200 Iraqi soldiers have been killed in the fight for Mosul and more than 6,000 have been wounded; I pay tribute to their courage and sacrifice. They have been supported since September 2014, with the permission of this House, by the RAF, whose precision strikes represent two-thirds of the coalition effort outside the US operations against more than 750 Daesh targets. The Army has trained more than 58,000 local Iraqi personnel in skills from counter-IED to medical support. The Royal Navy has helped to protect the US and French aircraft carriers from which strikes have been flown. The UK's cyber-capability has helped to disrupt the extremists' activities. As a result, in Iraq more than 1.8 million people have been freed from Daesh's cruel rule.

Daesh has now lost more than 70% of the territory that it once occupied in Iraq, but the liberation of Mosul does not mean that Daesh has been defeated in Iraq, or indeed in Syria. We in this country need no reminding of the danger that Daesh still poses. In the past few months, our nation has suffered three appalling attacks inspired by the ideology shared by Daesh. We must continue our comprehensive strategy to defeat it, and I want to update the House on three areas.

The first is the military effort. We must ensure that there are no safe havens for Daesh in Syria and Iraq. That is why Iraqi security forces, with United Kingdom support, will go on to defeat Daesh in Tal Afar and Hawija, uproot it from the Euphrates river valley, and clear the area of the improvised explosive devices that threaten the lives of so many innocent civilians. As Iraq is secured—we have some months to go—we will in Syria continue supporting the Syrian Democratic Forces, who have so far ejected Daesh from around 51% of the territory it once held in Syria.

The battle for Raqqa—Daesh's command and control centre—has begun. Syrian Democratic Forces currently control around 20% of that city. The SDF is relying heavily on coalition air assets, surveillance, reconnaissance, and pinpoint missile strikes, which we will continue to provide as part of the global coalition. As we maintain pressure on Mosul and Raqqa, we will continue to tighten the net around this callous organisation, squeezing the terrorists on simultaneous fronts, striking their senior

leadership, countering their poisonous narrative, and cutting off their finances, as they progressively lose access to the oil infrastructure on which they relied.

The second area is humanitarian aid. We will continue to provide stabilisation and humanitarian assistance. My right hon. Friend the International Development Secretary updated this House yesterday on the humanitarian response required in Mosul, yet while that city can at last begin to look forward, the humanitarian situation in Syria remains dire: 13.5 million people urgently need humanitarian assistance; 4.5 million of them are in areas that are hard to reach, and 1.3 million of them live under siege-like conditions. It is estimated that around 100,000 civilians remain in Raqqa city, caught between Daesh and Assad, and in desperate need of aid.

Our response has been to commit £2.46 billion to support for Syria—the largest ever British response to a single humanitarian crisis—while pushing for better access, so that much-needed food and medicine can reach people, and for an end to attacks on civilians. UK support has helped to stabilise the region more widely. Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan have become hosts to large-scale Syrian populations. The Department for International Development has helped to ensure that those countries have been given the assistance that they need in hosting large refugee populations; this improves regional security and reduces consequent migration pressures in Europe.

The third area is stronger governance. Humanitarian aid is only part of the answer. A meaningful political settlement is needed now to guarantee sustainable peace, so we are working with our international allies to strengthen regional governance. With regard to Iraq, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary emphasised to Foreign Minister al-Jaafari at their recent meeting in London, that means focusing on inclusive politics post-Mosul, allaying fears, addressing the grievances that led to the rise of Daesh, and sticking to the April 2018 election timetable.

In Syria, the barbaric chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhoun in April reminds us that the Assad regime is no partner for peace. We continue to work for a transition towards new governance, which is fully representative and committed to protecting the rights of everyone in Syria. It is for Syrians to decide how that happens, as part of a Syrian-led transition process, but to reach that goal we continue to support the work of United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura as well as the political process he is overseeing in Geneva. We are engaging with the opposition to help them move towards a political settlement, and we use our role in the Security Council and our participation in the International Syria Support Group to push for progress.

The recently negotiated ceasefire and de-escalation agreement brokered by the United States, Russia and Jordan is welcome. We hope it will lead to further de-escalation agreements and generate renewed momentum in the political process, but that all depends on all the parties involved, which we encourage now to comply. We have seen these agreement before. What will count is what holds on the ground.

As I took office three years ago, Daesh was closing in on the gates of Baghdad. Today it is a failing organisation, but one that remains a threat. Mosul has now been liberated, but the war remains to be won in Iraq as well as in Syria. Our resolve, as a leading member of the

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coalition, is unwavering. We will continue to do all we can to defeat Daesh, counter its warped ideology, bring stability to the region, and provide greater security to our people and our allies at home and abroad.

11.41 am

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for advance sight of it.

The liberation of Mosul marks the end of three years of Daesh control of the city, and we pay tribute to all the personnel who have taken part in the campaign, especially to our servicemen and women who have served in Operation Shader. Although the battle for Mosul has almost concluded, the fight against Daesh in Iraq and the wider region is far from over. Will the Secretary of State tell us about the nature of the support that the UK will continue to provide to Iraqi ground troops as they advance westward to clear the remaining towns and cities in Iraq that are under Daesh control?

Our armed forces have taken every precaution to prevent civilian casualties, and intelligence and targeting are vital to that, but the Secretary of State will be aware that Amnesty International has produced a report that is highly critical of the Iraqi Government and the coalition. It has been alleged that the actions of the coalition in Mosul have been “disproportionate” and even “unlawful”. Major General Rupert Jones, the deputy commander of the international anti-Daesh coalition, has condemned the report in the strongest possible terms, saying that it is “deeply irresponsible”. He has emphatically stated that we should not forget that it is Daesh that is “deliberately killing civilians”. What is the Secretary of State’s response to Amnesty’s report?

The Iraqi Government have concerns about the possibility of Daesh fighters crossing back into Iraq from Syria, so what role will our armed forces play in ensuring the security of the border between Iraq and Syria? As the operation against Daesh moves from one of counter-insurgency to counter-terrorism, the training that the UK provides to Iraqi forces will prove all the more essential. Will the Secretary of State update the House on the support and training that we will continue to give to the Iraqi ground forces?

The campaign against Daesh in Syria is undoubtedly more challenging and complex than in Iraq. Although I appreciate that there are limitations on what the Defence Secretary is able to tell the House, will he be a little more specific on the role our armed forces will have in the liberation of Raqqa from Daesh control?

Finally, as the Secretary of State will be aware, a number of Members on both sides of the House, including my hon. Friend the shadow Defence Secretary, have been calling for an operational service medal for personnel on Operation Shader. As the campaign in Mosul draws to a close, I would suggest that it is now the time to provide proper recognition to all those who have served on that operation and played a vital part in the fight against Daesh and its perverse ideology.

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said, particularly about the role of our servicemen. A large number of our servicemen and women have now served in this theatre for nearly three

years, sometimes under the most intense conditions, and it is right that we should, on both sides of this House, pay tribute to them.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the next stage of this campaign. It is important to emphasise that Mosul itself has not finally fallen; there is still a small pocket of resistance. Indeed, a Tornado and a Typhoon were over the city yesterday, bombing a final Daesh position, so there is still work to be done there. There will be work to be done to assist Iraqi forces in the capture of Tal Afar and Nineveh, so the campaign goes on and may well become more complex as Daesh spreads out and moves to some of the less populated areas.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the Amnesty report. I have not seen the Amnesty report as of yet, but I would certainly recommend that he does heed, as he has done, the words of Major General Rupert Jones, who is the deputy coalition commander. I can reassure the House that, so far as our own participation in the coalition is concerned, the airstrikes that we carry out are absolutely lawful and are conducted in accordance with the law of armed conflict and international humanitarian law. We have rigorous rules of engagement, which I set at the beginning of the campaign. There are very robust targeting procedures. Where the RAF are involved, they gather intelligence about the target they are aiming to strike. They strike it with a choice of weapon that is designed to absolutely minimise the risk of civilian casualties. They go back afterwards and do an assessment of the blast area and whether there were any unforeseen consequences.

Where there are allegations that the wrong building was hit or that there have been civilian casualties, again, we on the coalition side absolutely investigate those allegations. We publish the findings. This is in distinction to what the Russians and the Syrian regime have been doing in Syria. We investigate, we publish the findings, and if mistakes were made and procedures need to be corrected, that is done. But I want to assure the House that I have seen no evidence as of yet that an RAF strike has involved civilian casualties. I wait to see that evidence being produced, and if anybody has any evidence, it needs to be forwarded to us, as, indeed, other organisations, like Airwars, have been doing throughout the conflict, and we are ready to investigate. Otherwise, I would urge extreme caution in the handling of the Amnesty report.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the border area between Iraq and Syria. It is that middle bit of the Euphrates river valley where we now anticipate Daesh will coalesce, having been driven out of Raqqa in Syria eventually, and from Mosul and Tal Afar in Iraq. Our training effort will now be, of course, in Iraq. The training we do at al-Asad airbase in Anbar province will be to improve the capability of the Iraqi forces to police their border, having secured it. We will be doing more of that in conjunction with our other allies.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the campaign in Syria. We will continue with airstrikes. Again yesterday, a pair of our aircraft were in action on the edge of Raqqa, assisting that campaign. There is a lot of work to be done before Raqqa is liberated, and other towns in the Euphrates river valley, such as Mayadin, remain under Daesh control. The air campaign—the reconnaissance and the intelligence-gathering—will



probably become even more important as Daesh eventually moves from Raqqa and starts to disperse round some of these smaller towns.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked about medallic recognition. I think the whole House would want to see this huge effort properly rewarded. I am awaiting final advice from the military on that, and I hope to make an announcement shortly.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** On his re-election, I call Dr Julian Lewis.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The reason why, surely, these cities have not been liberated sooner is precisely the care that is being taken in the targeting of the aerial bombardment. Does the Secretary of State accept that whereas the intervention with airstrikes in Iraq was non-controversial because we were prepared to see the army of the Iraqi Government win, the same does not apply in Syria? Apart from the Kurdish elements in Syria, who else does he expect to run the country when Daesh's land is taken from it, if not the Syrian Government, with or without Assad?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** Let me repeat your congratulations, Mr Deputy Speaker, to my right hon. Friend on resuming his chairmanship of the Select Committee. I look forward to working with him on that.

I know that my right hon. Friend and I have always differed on the nature of the Syrian campaign and that he has had reservations about it. He is right to recognise the difference in that we are not working with the Syrian regime. However, we do want to see Daesh driven out of Syria. It remains a threat—in Syria, to this country—and it needs to be defeated in Syria. But of course, as he says, we then need those parts of Syria returned to civilian control—a control that properly involves the Arab population as well as, in the north, the Kurdish elements. That is all part of the process that we are encouraging in Geneva. He is right that the solution lies in Arab-led governance.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): I, too, thank the Defence Secretary for his statement and advance notice of it. Let me put on record the tribute of Scottish National party Members to the forces who have been involved, particularly in liberating Mosul to the extent that it has been. I also extend our congratulations to the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) on his re-election as Chair of the Defence Committee.

Scottish National party Members, and indeed the whole House, will welcome the diminished status that Daesh now has. While there is a difference of opinion as to how to move that from a diminished status to being defeated, there is of course unanimity that defeated it must be.

There are two particular areas of concern that I would like the Defence Secretary to address. The first is the dramatic rise in civilian casualties in the past few weeks. In June alone, there was a 52% increase on May's estimated figure of 529 to 744, according to Airwars, which he mentioned in response to the shadow Minister. Airwars claims that of the 1,350 UK personnel fighting Daesh, not one is permanently tasked with monitoring

civilian casualties. Will he make a commitment to greater scrutiny and transparency on that, and will he ensure that there are dedicated monitoring and investigation mechanisms within Operation Shader for UK forces?

The second point—the Defence Secretary knows of my particular concern about this because I have written to him specifically about it—is about the operation in Syria itself. The 2015 mandate of this House was very clearly about targeting Daesh, and nobody else in Syria. I tried to get some clarity from him on this on Monday. I do not know whether he misunderstood my question, but I did not get the clarity I was seeking. Will he confirm that the 2015 mandate to target Daesh stands, and that the Government have no plans to expand that target to any other actor; and that if they do, as the US President seems to wish the United Kingdom to do, it will happen only on the back of a debate and vote of Members of this House?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the tribute he has paid to our armed forces. It is worth reminding the House that the Scottish nationalists voted against military action in both Iraq and Syria. It is all very well to say that they now welcome the fact that Daesh has been defeated in Iraq, but how much longer would Daesh have continued to behead people, to shoot people and to throw gays off buildings without air power, including British air power, and without the involvement of 68 countries around the world, but not the support of the Scottish nationalists? He should reflect on that.

We work with Airwars when it has allegations and suspects that there might have been British aircraft in the air at the time in question. We look at that information and investigate it. So far we have not found any evidence of civilian casualties being caused by a British strike, but we continue to work with Airwars, and if it has fresh evidence it should put it to us and we will investigate it. As I indicated, we also carry out what is called a battle damage assessment after any strike to see exactly what effect it has had and whether there is any risk that there may have been casualties.

The hon. Gentleman is right to point to the increase in civilian casualties in the final weeks of the battle in west Mosul. It is a highly compact and densely populated city, and Daesh pushed civilians into buildings, held them hostage and shot them if they tried to escape. This was intense urban warfare of a type that we have not been involved in since probably the second world war—a very complex military operation. However, it would not have been easier if it had been extended and we had let it drift on for months. The job had to be done, and I pay tribute to those involved in it, including our pilots for their skill and precision alongside the rest of the coalition.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked about Syria, as he did on Monday. He has also written to me about it—I have in fact replied to him; I signed the letter yesterday, but he may not have had it yet. It certainly gives clarity on the point that he raised with me.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Is the expectation of sufficient reform in Iraq realistic?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** Yes, indeed. The Abadi Government are representative of all parts of Iraq. Abadi himself is a Shi'a; the President of Iraq, whom I met, is a Kurd;

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and my opposite number, the Defence Minister, is a Sunni. They are a genuinely representative Government, but they have work to do to provide reassurance, particularly to the Sunni populations and tribes of Nineveh and Anbar provinces in the west, that they too have a stake in modern Iraq and must feel part of it, and that they will be protected from any kind of Shi'a aggression such as they have suffered from in the past. The Government are representative and have lasted longer than some critics originally suggested they would, but they now have a huge amount of work to do to stabilise the areas that have been liberated and promote genuine political reconciliation.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State referred twice to Staffan de Mistura's negotiations in Geneva, but he did not mention the Russian-Turkish-Iranian initiative and the meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan. What is the British Government's assessment of the role of that process and the fact that it seems to be undermining efforts in Geneva?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** We support any genuine efforts to reduce violence in Syria and bring the civil war to an end, but we cannot endorse the Astana process for a number of reasons, principally because of the status it gives Iran as a guarantor of Syria's future. That is not acceptable. We want the pluralist type of governance in Syria that we now have in Iraq, and that does not require further interference from Iran.

**Sir Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset) (Con): I was delighted to hear my right hon. Friend refer in both his statement and his answers to the need for inclusive politics post-Mosul in order to win the peace, as well as the war, in Iraq. Can he assure the House that Her Majesty's Government will keep up the pressure on the Abadi regime to ensure that the new governor of Mosul fully respects the rights and needs of all sections of the population there?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** Absolutely. The answer to that is an unequivocal yes. It is now so important that the city administrations and the governorates get engaged in the process of political reconciliation. My Foreign Office colleagues and I continue to urge that on the Abadi Government as an absolute precondition for the kind of reconciliation that we want to see.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): I welcome the liberation of Mosul and pay tribute to members of our armed forces who have been involved. The tactics used by Daesh mean that the cost to both the infrastructure and the people of Mosul has been great. Will the Secretary of State outline what strategy Iraq could take to rebuild the infrastructure of Mosul and to allow the return of those refugees who have fled Mosul over the past few years?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** An encouraging number of dispossessed Maslawis—people of Mosul—are returning to east Mosul. They are returning in quite large numbers now, and markets and schools are beginning to reopen. West Mosul has of course been much more badly damaged than east Mosul and a huge amount of reconstruction has to be done there. That will be led by

the United Nations Development Programme and its co-ordinator, but we will be playing our part financially and in the organisation of the rebuilding programme.

**Victoria Atkins** (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): RAF pilots and service personnel have played a vital role in this coalition campaign, particularly my constituents flying from RAF Coningsby. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking my constituents who have taken part in Operation Shader? Will he explain, please, the vital role that the RAF plays in ensuring freedom of movement on the ground, which enables Iraqi forces to combat Daesh?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** It is right that we pay tribute to the RAF, and not only to the pilots, who are always mentioned on occasions such as this, but to the huge numbers of other RAF members, such as the air crew, those who service, maintain and guard the planes, and those involved in the intelligence work of studying and preparing the targets. It has been a massive effort. The RAF is working at probably its highest tempo for more than a quarter of a century, and it is right that we should pay proper tribute to it.

The role of the RAF has been huge. Noticeably, more than 60% of the strikes not conducted by the United States in Mosul were conducted by the RAF and not by any other country, simply because of the precision of our pilots, the intelligence that goes into the selection of targets and the precision of the weapons that were chosen for each of those strikes. Now, the RAF will be increasingly involved in close air support as Daesh moves out of the cities and starts to coalesce along the Euphrates river valley.

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to the men and women of our armed forces and the civilians who support them. Given that operations against Daesh are likely to endure for some time and that since the previous defence and security review we have had a change to our national security context, a general election and a referendum in which Britain decided to leave the European Union, what plans do the Government now have to conduct a strategic defence and security review?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** On the first point, as I indicated, the campaign in Iraq is not over. It has many months to run, and I expect British forces to be involved well into 2018. The situation in Syria is even more complex. The work of the RAF and Army trainers is likely to continue for some time.

The previous strategic defence review was only 18 months ago. The threats that were set out in it—from Russian aggression, Daesh, other terrorism and cyber—remain the principal ones facing this country. That review did not forecast the referendum or indeed its result, but I do not think we can blame defence intelligence for that—a lot of people did not predict that event. However, the review was only 18 months ago, although we will of course have a look to see if any of it needs any kind of refresh.

**Leo Docherty** (Aldershot) (Con): The role of the British armed forces in mentoring and training our Iraqi allies has been critical to the success of the operation. What plans do we have for continuing that support to the Iraqi military into the future?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's question and I pay tribute to his own service. It is worth reminding the House that we are in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi Government. Everything that we have done as part of the coalition has been with the authority and at the request and invitation of the Iraqi Government. Although we have not entered into those discussions, I anticipate that the Iraqi Government would welcome the continuation of the coalition's training effort and indeed the support of air power until Daesh is completely eliminated from their borders.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): We all welcome the progress made in defeating Daesh in Mosul and Raqqa and pay tribute to the bravery and tenacity of the forces on the ground and in the air in liberating so many people from Daesh's cruel yoke. The Secretary of State has set out in great detail the effort that the RAF makes to avoid civilian casualties—rightly, in view of the terms of the resolutions of September 2014 and December 2015 that the House passed. Is he satisfied that all our partners in the air campaign are making the same efforts to avoid civilian casualties?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** Certainly, as far as I can be. There are coalition rules of engagement and there are slightly different rules of engagement for each country involved in the campaign. It is perfectly true that targets have been offered or discussed within the coalition that we have chosen not to strike because of the rules that we apply. Each country approaches the matter in a slightly different way. However, the principal dozen air forces involved all work together in the same headquarters, and the rules that apply have become closer over the duration of the campaign. It is worth saying that, sadly, it is simply not possible to liberate a densely populated city such as Mosul without civilian casualties. Of course, those casualties have been made much worse by Daesh's policy of holding civilians hostage in buildings, shooting people trying to escape the city and generally making the population continue to suffer.

**Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to the role that our armed forces have played and the progress that has been made. Will he reassure me that he is working closely with the Minister for the Middle East, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt)—I know that we all greatly welcome him back to the Front Bench—and our allies in the region to ensure that, as Daesh is pushed back, its fighters are contained and not displaced to pop up elsewhere in the region?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** Yes, that is an increasing part of the work of the counter-Daesh coalition, in which I participate in so far as the defence effort is concerned, and in which my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for the Middle East participate on foreign policy. We work across the coalition to ensure that we can share intelligence on returning fighters, explore how Daesh leadership can now be held properly to account—let us not forget the British hostages who were beheaded two to three years ago—and that, where possible, those who committed those most heinous crimes can now be brought to justice.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): With more Yazidi women being freed this week with the liberation of Mosul, will the Secretary of State say more about the particular case of the Yazidis and whether the Government have reached a conclusion on whether their treatment by Daesh is genocide?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** We continue to look for more evidence, specifically on the Yazidis, to ascertain whether the brutal treatment that they suffered was genocidal. We are also accumulating evidence across the board so that those who are eventually detained can be properly held to account.

**Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying particular tribute to the Kurdish peshmerga, who have made a vital and continuing contribution to the defeat of Daesh? Can he assure the House that we will give them every possible assistance in training, equipment and weaponry, but also, importantly, access to medical care and treatment for their wounded? Is not there a case for providing additional, specialist care here in the UK for their most badly wounded?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East is looking at that specific point, but I too pay tribute to the peshmerga, and, indeed, to what has been an all-Iraq effort. There has not been the distinction that people fear between the different groupings in Iraq. The campaign to liberate Mosul was conducted by agreement between the different parts of the Iraqi forces, and that was done successfully. We played our part in helping to train peshmerga forces, and much of the training that we supplied was designed precisely to reduce the number of battlefield casualties that they might otherwise have suffered, particularly from improvised explosive devices.

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): I welcome the statement, and I agree with the Secretary of State that an important element of progress is countering the violent extremist ideology of Daesh and others. Does he agree that one of the most eloquent ways of doing that is demonstrating, through the reconstruction of Mosul and Raqqa and the establishment of law and order and security for the people who live there, that there are better systems of governing than those provided by ISIL?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** Absolutely. It must be central to the work of stabilisation and reconciliation that we have a form of governance in Mosul, in the council there and in the wider provincial government, that is genuinely representative of all interests in Mosul, which is a very complex city, to ensure that all those living there have a proper stake in its future, and that the conditions under which the likes of Daesh originally flourished do not re-emerge.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I join others in welcoming the statement and the liberation of Mosul, but what steps are the Government taking, as Daesh is defeated, to deal with the threat posed by dangerous individuals who seek to return to the United Kingdom?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** The purpose of part of the work that is being done in the coalition is to recover sensitive material in both Mosul and Raqqa—as the Syrian democratic forces move into Raqqa—that will enable us to track down foreign fighters, particularly British fighters, who have been based in either city, and, indeed, foreign fighters in those cities who have been involved in planning external attacks on the cities of western Europe. We are urgently trying to recover that material, which will enable us to identify more of those who are involved in planning of that kind and thus ensure that they are detained and properly held to account.

**Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab):** May I ask a question on the same theme? The Secretary of State mentioned Interpol. Welcome though the liberation of Mosul is, we know that the capacity to deal with returnees from Iraq poses a challenge to our already overstretched intelligence and counter-terrorism services. Can the Secretary of State assure the House that the Government have sufficient capacity, not just in this country but throughout Europe, to ensure that returnees are dealt with appropriately?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** Yes. We are putting extra resources into our agencies to ensure that that is being done in this country, and we are working with other police forces across the coalition to share intelligence about the foreign fighters who are identified so that we have better information when they attempt to cross the borders back into western Europe, and so that each of us understands how we are now likely to prosecute those who have been involved in the fighting.

**Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti), does my right hon. Friend agree that we should pay special tribute to those in the Kurdistan region? They are building democracy, they have a rule of law, and they made a huge effort in defeating Daesh. Can my right hon. Friend guarantee not just that we will give military support, but that we will do everything possible to help them to build their emerging democracy?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election to the chairmanship of the Education Committee. I am sure that my colleagues look forward to working with him.

We work very closely with the Kurdish authorities—I meet the Prime Minister and president there regularly—and we want to see the economy and stability of the region improve. It is, of course, part of Iraq overall, and the future of Iraq, ultimately, is for the Iraqi people to determine.

**John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op):** The fact that, apparently, there is currently no evidence that a single civilian casualty has resulted from an RAF strike during this campaign is extraordinary and commendable. Further to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), may I ask what influence the UK armed forces can have on some of our coalition partners, in whose cases the rules of engagement have clearly been different and the civilian death toll has been higher?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I was, I hope, careful to remind the House that this is war. While we as a coalition do everything to try to minimise the risk of civilian casualties, it is not possible to eliminate that risk entirely when we are trying to free cities from terrorism of this kind. I was equally careful to say that there is no evidence yet from an RAF strike. I am not claiming that that might never be the case, but so far no such evidence has been presented to us.

We work across the coalition with the other countries involved in airstrikes to ensure that we apply broadly the same rules of engagement: that we are selecting the same targets, for instance, and that we have the same institutions, such as mosques and hospitals, on our no-strike lists. Each country is slightly different; there are variations; but what we encourage our partners to do—and I think this is the best possible answer to the regime in Syria—is to be straight, and when an allegation is made, to investigate it, publish the findings, and if it then becomes clear that there were faults in procedures, set out how they will be put right.

**Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con):** Daesh's atrocities have failed to deliver a caliph, let alone the so-called caliphate. As Daesh are flushed out of Mosul, they will convene in other parts of Iraq and Syria. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must recognise that our military will continue to play a role in defeating Daesh for a considerable time to come?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** Yes. The military campaign is not over yet, in Iraq or indeed in Syria. We have every interest in staying the course, because we need to keep our country safe. There are still people in Raqqa who wish us harm and want to carry out attacks in this country and in other western European cities. We must not rest until that threat is removed, and then we must pay attention to what the Iraqi authorities want and to the scale of the training that they may now require.

**Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op):** It is good to see so many Members entering the Chamber to hear my question. *[Laughter.]*

I pay tribute to our amazing armed forces personnel, who have acted with the utmost bravery and dedication in this conflict, and I second the calls for an operational service medal to be awarded. Given the special role that the Army has played in training during the conflict, among its many other roles, and given the depth, breadth and complexity of the operations that it now faces not only in this theatre but around the world, does the Secretary of State agree that this would be exactly the wrong time to reduce the number of our regular Army personnel?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I am grateful for the tribute that the hon. Gentleman paid to our armed forces. He will have heard what I said earlier about the issue of medallic recognition for personnel who served in this particular campaign. We have no plans to cut the size of the Army; indeed, in our manifesto we made a clear commitment to maintain the size of our armed forces.

**James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con):** The liberation of Mosul is a significant moment in our battle against Daesh, but does the Secretary of State

agree that the real victory will be the creation of a modern Iraqi state that is capable of governing itself for all the people of Iraq and of ensuring that it resists any infiltration by Daesh as we clear it out of Iraqi territory?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I absolutely agree. The kind of modern Iraqi state to which my hon. Friend aspires would not only reduce any threat to our country but would be good for the stability of the region. Iraq is already a democracy—a fragile democracy, but it is a democracy. It has called on its friends and allies throughout the world for help. Sixty-eight countries are in there, helping to bring about the kind of modern Iraq that he and I want.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and thank him for his commitment and leadership. I also thank our soldiers for the significant contribution that they have made to delivering the peace. The peshmerga have been a critical part of the allied forces to defeat Daesh, with many peshmerga fighters coming from Kurdistan. The regional government in Kurdistan wishes to have more devolved responsibilities and is seeking the release of moneys held in Baghdad for reconstruction. To deliver the transition to new governance that is fully representative and committed to protecting the rights of everyone, will he agree to those two issues being dealt with right away?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I am grateful for the personal words with which the hon. Gentleman began his remarks. Discussions are under way between the Kurdish authorities and the authorities in Baghdad on precisely those issues. We encourage those discussions. In the end, where there are disputes of that kind, they have to be resolved between the different parties in Erbil and Baghdad.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): The progress militarily in Mosul is welcome, but the poisonous ideology that underpins ISIL continues. What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the number of UK citizens fighting on behalf of ISIL/Daesh? What is happening about those who choose to return home, so that we can apprehend them and ensure that they are not a danger to UK citizens?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** On the first point, we have not yet defeated the virtual caliphate. It is important that, across the coalition, we now intensify our efforts to destroy that caliphate in cyberspace as effectively as we are beginning to undermine it in Iraq itself. On returning fighters, that is predominantly a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. However, Daesh is a proscribed organisation. Fighting for Daesh is a criminal offence and, where those people can be properly prosecuted, they will be charged on their return.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): In December 2015, we were assured that, with the support of UK airstrikes, we could expect to see a transitional Government in Syria within six months, and that there were 70,000 moderate ground troops ready to carry out a ground war in tandem with coalition airstrikes. What is the Secretary of State's current assessment as to when we can expect to see a transitional Government in Syria? How many of those 70,000 ground troops ever actually existed?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** On the first point, of course we want Syria to move towards a new political settlement and we continue to encourage that. So far as the existence of moderate armed opposition in Syria is concerned, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that the civil war would not be in its seventh year if there had not been formidable moderate armed opposition to the Syrian regime. Who does he think has been fighting Assad? It is important to recognise the progress that has been made since December 2015 in reducing Daesh and the amount of Syrian territory that it holds, in starting the battle to defeat it in its capital, Raqqa, and thus overall to reduce the threat that Daesh poses to the UK. I am only sorry that, although we had the support of 67 other countries throughout the world, we did not have the support of the Scottish National party.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State's statement. In particular, I welcome his comment about reducing the risk and the number of civilian casualties. Perhaps for the benefit of those who have just entered the Chamber he could repeat the number of civilian casualties there have been as a result of our actions and repeat his confirmation and assurance that he will do all he can to reduce further such risks?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend but I am not sure that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, would welcome me repeating too much of the statement that I gave earlier. However, I emphasise that I believe it is because of the rules of engagement that we set, the careful use of intelligence and reconnaissance from the air, the skill of our pilots, and the precision of the weapons that are selected for each strike that we are able to say that, to the best of our knowledge, we have not caused significant civilian casualties on the ground.

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I join the Secretary of State and Members of all parties in paying tribute to the work of the men and women in all three services. Does he agree that the important and prominent role played by the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force further reinforces this country's place as the United States' most important ally and a vital partner in the region to ensure the ultimate defeat of Daesh and to ensure peace in the region?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I agree. The United States has led the coalition. I was able to review the next steps in both Iraq and Syria when I met the US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis in Washington last Friday. He and his predecessor have played a key role in leading the coalition. Like us, they now want to see us move on in Iraq to the work of stabilisation and reconciliation that must follow the military campaign.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): I, too, pay tribute to all those who have served so diligently to make such progress. My right hon. Friend rightly mentioned in his statement the continued determination that we need to battle this warped ideology and to achieve long-term stability in the region, but what reassurance can he give my constituents and all communities throughout the

[Mims Davies]

UK that the Government are determined to share intelligence during Brexit and beyond to keep us all safer?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** We have made it clear that, beyond Brexit, we want to continue the various arrangements there are for security co-operation across Europe, including co-ordination between our intelligence agencies and the work of police in tracking foreign fighters. It is only by working together that we can ensure that this ideology is defeated not simply in Iraq but on a wider basis.

**Robert Courts (Witney) (Con):** I return to the question of the skill of our pilots in avoiding civilian casualties wherever possible. Can my right hon. Friend please confirm that that extends to the selection of hot and cold targets, so that targets can be changed even at the last moment to avoid those casualties?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** Yes. These are operational matters for decision by our commanders in the Gulf, but they keep those matters under review before each mission is planned and while each mission is being carried out. We had evidence of that yesterday in the strikes that a Tornado and a Typhoon together undertook in Raqqa and Mosul on the same day.

**Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. Like him, I welcome the fact that the RAF has played a key role in defeating Daesh on the battlefield. However, my concern is that it will now move from the battlefield to being a guerrilla organisation. Therefore, what support can he reassure me will be given to training local forces to deal with threats such as improvised explosive devices and others involved in a guerrilla war?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** That is already a key part of our training effort. We are working with the Iraqi forces, for example, as I said earlier, in strengthening their border force. We are working with the police, not simply the military, so that they are better equipped to deal with

the threat of insurgency when the final remnants of Daesh go underground, particularly in the Middle Euphrates River valley.

**Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con):** Defeating Daesh in its twin capitals is a key step to demolishing the myth of the caliphate but in the statement the Secretary of State also referred to undermining the poisonous ideology elsewhere. Will he expand on the steps that the Government are taking to do just that?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** Yes. We are working with our colleagues in the coalition to deal with the extremist ideology that lies behind this terrorism. We are working to counter it in cyberspace, taking down the messaging that is posted there. We are working here at home on steps to improve the deradicalisation effort where extremism exists in colleges, mosques and elsewhere. We work with the Muslim community to ensure that it is properly recognised and tackled.

**Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con):** Last, but hopefully not least, I would like to ask the following question of the Secretary of State. The war against Daesh is a complex form of unconventional warfare: a hard insurgency fought with other tools—cyber, governance, propaganda and so forth. Will my right hon. Friend assure us that this war will be properly studied and the lessons actually learned? There has been a tendency to see unconventional warfare as an occasional accident, when in many ways it is becoming the new norm; will it be understood and studied as such?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** That is a very important point and I hope it was recognised in the strategic defence review that we carried out in 2015. This war has had to be fought using the full spectrum of responses; it has been fought predominantly by, with, and through local forces, but involving a spectrum of responses right across the different domains, and it is very important that we recognise that this may well become the fighting of the future and we learn the lessons appropriately.

## Parliamentary Business

*Application for emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24).*

12.31 pm

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): I rise to propose that the House should debate a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration: the scheduling of business by the Leader of the House.

The title of the debate, if granted under this application, is that this House has considered the matter of the scheduling of parliamentary business and that, given the announcement by the Government of a two-year Session, references to “Session” in the Standing Orders should be interpreted as per year, therefore with dates allocated to be pro rata.

I have asked the Leader of the House several times for debates on issues that directly affect our constituents. We have just completed an election where we asked people to vote for us. As a parliamentary democracy, they expect us to debate and vote on motions that were relevant to their lives 31 days ago. Our constituents expected us to come back to work straight away; instead, since the Gracious Speech there have been only seven votes. *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. The hon. Lady must be heard. She has three minutes. Afterwards, if hon. Members wish to have an argument, they can have one; but the hon. Lady will be heard for her three minutes.

**Valerie Vaz:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. My next sentence was “This is undermining our democracy”, and there that is, right in front of us.

As you are aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have asked a number of times for a debate on statutory instruments that have been prayed against, as is the usual convention, but no time has been allocated.

The second reason is to do with the days allocated for private Member’s Bills. Only 13 have been allocated for one year up until November 2018. The current Session lasts for two years.

Thirdly, at the same time not a single date has been offered, or allocated for, an Opposition day for any party. Earlier, the Leader of the House said in response to a business question that a date was offered in September, but I am not aware of that. In this debate, we would also need to clarify what a Session is. It is now two years, but we would not expect one year’s worth of Opposition days to be allocated over the two years.

In support of this application, I repeat the Prime Minister’s words: “through debate and discussion,” these are the

“hallmarks of our parliamentary democracy”.

It is also important to our constitution to have the debate when required by convention as a number of statutory instruments will flow from the repeal Bill. That is why I make this application today.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I have listened carefully to the application from the hon. Member and have had the benefit of knowing the view expressed by Mr Speaker on the basis of the written material that the hon. Member supplied to him in advance, and I can tell the House that he is satisfied that the matter raised by the hon. Member is proper to be discussed under Standing Order No. 24. I now wish to ascertain whether the hon. Member has the leave of the House.

*Application agreed to.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member has obtained the leave of the House. Mr Speaker has decided that the debate will be held on Monday 17 July, as the first item of public business. The debate will last for three hours and will arise on a motion that the House has considered the specified matter set out in the hon. Member’s application.

## Points of Order

12.36 pm

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that in a moment the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill will be presented. It has already been online on the parliamentary website for the last hour and a half. This is a complete breach of the Standing Orders of the House: the convention is that it is presented to the House before it is presented to anybody else. Also, we cannot get a copy of it in the Vote Office, but we can get a copy of it online. I hope that there will be an investigation into this matter.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing)**: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing this matter to the attention of the Chair, and I understand that indeed the text of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill has been located on the Parliament website this morning, in advance of its presentation. This should not have happened, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that an investigation is currently under way into this most regrettable matter.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Has there been any indication from the Government Front Bench whether a Minister will come to the House to apologise for that transgression?

**Madam Deputy Speaker**: I have said that the matter is being investigated, and I am sure that the Treasury Bench has heard the points that have been made. *Interruption.* ] Order.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker**: I call Sir Desmond Swayne.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Do Ministers have any responsibility for the website of the House? *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker**: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. The House is lively this morning. Let us have a little order. I have already said that those who are responsible are carrying out an investigation, and in due course I am quite certain we will be able to report to the Chamber just what went wrong and make sure it does not happen again.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Madam Deputy Speaker**: Mr Gapes, is it really further to that point of order, because I have answered the point of order?

**Mike Gapes** *indicated assent*.

**Madam Deputy Speaker**: I call Mr Gapes.

**Mike Gapes**: During the investigation, will Government Ministers be questioned about how the House of Commons website obtained the document?

**Madam Deputy Speaker**: I have already answered that point. We have important business to get on to.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that, immediately after the presentation of the Bill and its First Reading, the Second Reading will deal with the principle of the Bill, according to “Erskine May” and all the rules of the House? Will you also confirm, with respect to this particular Bill, that although some do not seem to have seen it yet, it is about leaving the European Union and repealing the European Communities Act 1972 and that anyone who votes against its Second Reading will be in breach of that principle?

**Madam Deputy Speaker**: As the hon. Gentleman and the House know, the Bill in question is about to be presented. When the Minister presents the Bill, it will then be there for all to see. Each Member can make their own consideration of what the Bill is about and how they would like to interpret it. If they wish to try to amend it, that is what Parliament is for. I am quite sure that we will have plenty of discussion about that in the forthcoming weeks and months.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your advice on an issue that was debated in Westminster Hall on Wednesday 5 July—namely, the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaign. The debate was very well attended, and the resolution to accept the motion was rejected. Given that we have no Opposition day debates and no opportunity for Back-Bench business debates before the recess, would it be possible to have a deferred Division on this question so that Members can have a recorded vote on it?

**Madam Deputy Speaker**: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. It is also refreshing to have a point of order that is a point of order. My understanding is that, following the debate in Westminster Hall last week, the motion—that this House has considered the state pension age for women—was, most unusually, negatived. This might reflect the strength of feeling on the matter, but it does not have any procedural effect. The fact is that the question was put to the Members present in Westminster Hall and they came to a decision, which was to negative the motion. That has no procedural effect, but I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman and any of his colleagues wish to have the matter further considered, they will use their ingenious knowledge of parliamentary procedure to ensure that that happens.

## BILL PRESENTED

### EUROPEAN UNION (WITHDRAWAL)

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Secretary David Davis, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Damian Green, Mr Secretary Johnson and Mr Secretary Lidington, presented a Bill to repeal the European Communities Act 1972 and make other provision in connection with the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 5) with explanatory notes (Bill 5-EN).*



## Passchendaele

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** We now come to the general debate on the commemoration of Passchendaele—[*Interruption.*] I trust, as we are about to consider such a sombre and serious matter as those who gave their lives a century ago for the freedom that we now enjoy, that hon. Members who wish to leave the Chamber will have the decency to do so quietly. We now come to the general debate on the commemoration of Passchendaele, the third battle of Ypres.

Just before I call the Minister to introduce the debate I would like, most unusually, to welcome to the Palace of Westminster the two police officers who apprehended the murderer of our late colleague, Jo Cox. Craig Nicholls and Jonathan Wright are here with us, and we welcome them and commend them for their bravery. It is fitting that we should do so as we are about to have a debate commemorating those who gave their lives for freedom and democracy.

12.44 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (John Glen):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Commemoration of Passchendaele, the Third Battle of Ypres.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would like to reiterate your words of welcome to Mr Nicholls and Mr Wright. I am sure that the whole House is very pleased that they are with us today.

The commemoration of Passchendaele is just one of the national events in our first world war centenary programme, as announced by the previous Prime Minister in 2012. This four-year programme has seen us deliver national events on 4 August 2014 to mark the centenary of Britain's entry into the war, with services for the Commonwealth at Glasgow Cathedral, at St Symphorien military cemetery and at Westminster Abbey. In April 2015, we marked the Gallipoli campaign in Turkey and at the Cenotaph in Whitehall.

**Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab):** I also congratulate the two police officers on their bravery. Does the Minister have any plans to commemorate the battle of Loos?

**John Glen:** That is certainly something that I can consider, but I have no immediate plans at this point.

Last year on 31 May, we commemorated the famous naval battle, the battle of Jutland, with events in Orkney, and then one month later, on 1 July, we remembered the battle of the Somme with national events in France, London and Manchester. Overnight vigils were held at Westminster Abbey and in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, and replicated in local communities across the UK.

Before I go on, I would like to acknowledge the huge support of my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), who has shaped and steered this centenary programme. He is a hugely valued colleague, as well as being my parliamentary neighbour. I should also like to take this opportunity to congratulate him on his election to the chairmanship of the Northern Ireland Select Committee. If he brings to that role the integrity, wisdom and hard work that he has brought to this project, the House will be very well served. In addition,

I would like to thank the members of the Secretary of State's first world war centenary advisory group, who have provided vital advice and guided my Department through the programme every step of the way. I was tempted to name all of them, but there are just too many. However, I want to put on record the Government's gratitude for their work. In just over two weeks' time we will deliver our next commemorative event. Officially known as the third battle of Ypres, Passchendaele is one of the most famous battles of the first world war.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab):** I, too, want to add my commendation to the police officers who are with us today. The South Wales Borderers and the 2nd Battalion the Monmouthshire Regiment showed incredible heroism and made great sacrifices at Passchendaele. Both included members from my constituency. Soldiers were also lost in the days leading up to the battle. The 2nd Battalion the Monmouthshire Regiment moved up to the forward line on 29 July in preparation for the battle on 31 July. As we entirely appropriately remember those who gave so much in the battle, can we also remember those whose lives were lost, perhaps through wounds, in the days before?

**John Glen:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that contribution. He makes a wise point with his customary eloquence, and I am sure it will be echoed across the House.

The battle was infamous not only for the terrible conditions but for the sheer scale of the losses. In the region of 250,000 allied soldiers and around the same number of German soldiers, a total of some 500,000 men from both sides, were wounded, killed or missing. Those are quite frankly unbelievable numbers. Fought between 31 July and 10 November 1917, the battle saw the British Army attempt to break out of the notorious Ypres Salient and put intolerable pressure on the German defences. Troops from across Britain and Ireland took part, along with significant numbers from today's Commonwealth, particularly from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. Allied air forces played an important role, providing vital reconnaissance for the ground forces and fighting deadly dogfights with their German counterparts in the skies above the trenches. The battle was conceived, in part, as a means of influencing the struggle against German submarines, and the Royal Naval Division served on Passchendaele's battlefield alongside other soldiers. Many others contributed during the battle and in the fighting around Ypres during the conflict, including servicemen from India and the West Indies, labourers from China and, of course, the nurses and medical staff who worked behind the lines to treat the wounded.

For all those who fought in that small corner of Flanders in the late summer and autumn of 1917, including those in the Belgian, French and German armies, it would prove to be one of the most gruelling experiences of the conflict. Much of the first world war's enduring photography, poetry and artwork was inspired by the desolate landscape, which became a featureless quagmire over the course of the battle. After periods of intense rain, the mud became so bad that men and animals could be swallowed up in the swamp. Images, such as the photography of Frank Hurley or the evocative paintings of Paul Nash, are a harrowing reflection of the utter devastation that was wrought.

[John Glen]

Many families, villages and towns were touched by the fighting. In Wales, the battle is partly remembered for the loss of the renowned poet Ellis Evans—better known by his bardic name Hedd Wyn—who died on Pilckem Ridge on the opening day of the battle.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): I apologise to the Minister because I have to be briefly absent for part of the debate, but I will return at the earliest opportunity. I know that props are not always welcome in the Chamber, but in the light of what he said about photographs, may I share with him a pair of photographs? They show Passchendaele village in June 1917 and in December 1917, and it is possible even from a distance to see how entirely the landscape was obliterated by the bombardment.

**John Glen:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his pertinent intervention, which the whole House will welcome.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. The Minister is right that the whole House will welcome the right hon. Gentleman's illustration, but the House will note that there is a good reason why we do not use props. I did not stop the right hon. Gentleman in this exceptional circumstance, because he showed us the photographs with the very best of intentions. I am not quite sure how *Hansard* will record the pictures, but the Minister is right to note the right hon. Gentleman's point.

**John Glen:** That day also saw the death of the Irish poet Francis Ledwidge. It is important to remember that many of those who fought at Passchendaele were conscripts and that the war had already led to huge changes around these islands. Women were already playing a vital role in the war effort, particularly in the production of munition for the artillery, which was so critical to the outcome of the fighting. For many of us, Passchendaele has come to epitomise the horrors of trench warfare on the western front.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): I think my hon. Friend knows what I am about to say, but does he recall that, through him and the Wiltshire Regiment, I presented the city of Salisbury with a bugle that was used by the 1st Wiltshire Regiment? I understand that it is now in the museum as a recognition and a memory of the brave people who fought in that wonderful battle.

**John Glen:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me and the House of that kind gift. It represents a whole plethora of gifts and memories concerning the first and second world wars that many Members of this House and many of constituents have in their families. It is important that we put those exhibits out there so that the next generation can fully grasp what happened during this period of our history.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): I rise because of the description of Passchendaele as a "wonderful battle." For many who were there, including my father, it was a terrible tragedy that resulted from the misjudgment of generals and others. We cannot look at it without remembering that many of those who lost their lives—they did not give their lives—were told that if they went there, they would stop the "Huns" bayoneting

Belgian babies. They went there as a result of persuasion and propaganda, and we must remember that if we are going to learn the proper lessons of war and the immense and wasteful loss of human life.

**John Glen:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. Every Member will have a different emphasis and interpretation of events, and I hope that the debate will give everyone an opportunity to reflect in our own way on the events of 100 years ago.

Three commemorative events will be held in Belgium on 30 and 31 July 2017 at iconic locations where soldiers fought, survived, died and are commemorated. On Sunday 30 July, we will begin with the traditional last post ceremony at the Menin Gate in Ypres. It is one of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's most iconic memorials. It was built to honour all of those who fought around Ypres during the first world war and also bears the names of more than 54,000 individuals who died while serving with the forces of Britain, Australia, Canada, India and South Africa but for whom there is no known grave. Designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, it is a remarkable monument, and a fitting place to start our proceedings. The last post ceremony has been held there at 20:00 hours every evening since the unveiling of the memorial in 1927—with the exception of the second world war, when the ceremony was held at Brookwood military cemetery near Woking. It is organised by the Last Post Association and its buglers have performed the ceremony since its origin.

The ceremony will commemorate the UK's shared history with Belgium. A UK military band and the National Youth Choir of Scotland will perform, and wreaths will be laid by representatives of some 23 nations who fought on the Ypres Salient during the war. Two hundred invited guests will attend, as well as 200 descendants who were successful in a public ballot and whose ancestors are named on the Menin Gate. After the ceremony, events will be held outside the Cloth Hall in Ypres' Market Square to an estimated audience of around 6,000 members of the public, plus our invited guests. We will creatively tell the story of the war in the Ypres Salient from 1914, with a particular focus on the third battle of Ypres of 1917. Projecting on the Cloth Hall, we will use a range of contemporary digital techniques to bring history to life. Projections will enable the use of a broad range of visual media from photographic and film archive to animation. The projections will be supported by live readings and poetry and musical performances, including an orchestra and choir. The event will add a distinctive, engaging and contemporary element to the centenary programme that will help us to reach a wider and, I hope, younger audience, which is a key objective of the commemorations.

On Monday 31 July, exactly 100 years since the battle began, a national commemorative event will be held at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Tyne Cot cemetery near Zonnebeke. In terms of burials, it is the largest CWGC cemetery in the world, being the final resting place of almost 12,000 Commonwealth servicemen, of whom more than 8,300 remain unidentified.

**James Heappey** (Wells) (Con): My hon. Friend has mentioned the Commonwealth War Graves Commission site at Ypres, and he mentions another now. Will he join me in paying tribute to all those, not just in north-western European but across the world, who maintain our

Commonwealth war grave sites with such dignity and who so brilliantly maintain the memory of those who died in service to their country?

**John Glen:** I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend, as I was just about to do that. He is right to mention their enormous contribution over the last 100 years.

Tyne Cot is the final resting place of almost 12,000 Commonwealth servicemen, of whom more than 8,300 remain unidentified—among them four German soldiers. At the heart of the cemetery is the Tyne Cot blockhouse, a formidable German fortification captured during the fighting and then used as a medical post. After the war, remains were brought to Tyne Cot from across the surrounding battlefields, but most of those buried there are thought to have died during the third battle of Ypres.

When the Menin Gate was constructed, its walls proved insufficient to bear the names of all the missing of the Ypres Salient, so a memorial wall at Tyne Cot bears the names of nearly 35,000 men who were killed after 16 August 1917 and whose graves are not known.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Minister troubled, as I am, by the inherent tension within the nation's commemorative programme for the first world war between the need to remember the sacrifice of previous generations and the desire to instil in current generations the need for patriotism and potential sacrifice in defence of our values? The dreadful, needless mass loss of life in the first world war was perhaps different from the second world war.

**John Glen:** The hon. Gentleman makes a typically thoughtful representation of the challenge in getting these commemorations right. I hope he will recognise that a lot of thought and work has gone into trying to get that balance right. I hope we will begin to understand how it is being balanced when we hear from some of my colleagues, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison).

I will reflect, as I said I would, on the CWGC, which commemorates 54,000 of the missing on the Menin Gate and a further 35,000 on the memorial wall at Tyne Cot. When the names on other nearby memorials are added, the total comes to some 100,000 soldiers who have no known grave, numbers that are unimaginable in modern-day warfare.

Following the ballot for free tickets launched in January, I am delighted that around 3,900 descendants will attend the event at Tyne Cot. The content and staging of the event will evoke, I hope, a strong sense of place, making full use of the poignancy and historic significance of the cemetery. There will be readings by military personnel and descendants, musical performances by UK military bands, a choir and solo performances, and a formal act of remembrance. Readings of soldiers' recollections, letters and diaries, as well as poetry, will tell the story of the third battle of Ypres and the experiences of men who fought there. Content will reflect the contribution of men from across the UK and Ireland, as well as from the Commonwealth.

In addition, from 29 to 31 July, the Passchendaele centenary exhibition will be held at Passchendaele Memorial Park in Zonnebeke. We have been working with Memorial Museum Passchendaele, and the exhibition will include

contributions from a range of UK and Belgian museums and organisations. There will be artefacts, exhibition-style display boards and panels, living history groups and areas for historical talks and musical performances in open-air and covered areas. Memorial Museum Passchendaele will also have an exhibition entitled "Passchendaele, landscape at war," which will be open to visitors.

I thank and acknowledge the help and support given to us by all the local organisations and local communities in and around Ypres and Zonnebeke during the planning stages over the last year. Their support has been invaluable, and my thanks go particularly to the mayors of Ypres and Zonnebeke, who have led that contribution.

We have also had a huge amount of support from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which is celebrating its own centenary this year. This organisation is one of our key partners, and it does outstanding work in ensuring that 1.7 million people who died in the two world wars will never be forgotten. The CWGC cares for cemeteries and memorials at 23,000 locations in 154 countries and territories across the globe, making sure that our war dead are honoured with dignity. The CWGC recently launched a new scheme for interns who have been welcoming and guiding visitors at major cemeteries and memorials this summer, including at Tyne Cot. Also, the Ministry of Defence is a key partner that is contributing military assets to these events. I am delighted, too, that the BBC will be broadcasting the events on both Sunday night and Monday.

Our key themes across the entire first world war centenary programme are remembrance, youth and education. On youth and education, I am pleased that the National Youth Choir of Scotland will perform at all three commemorative events and that around 100 graduates of the National Citizen Service, aged 16 to 19, will be part of the delivery team at the commemorations. The graduates have undergone an educational programme on the first world war in readiness for their roles in Belgium.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am grateful for what the Minister is presenting to the House. I completely agree that it is only right and fitting that we should commemorate the loss of life at Passchendaele. Will he talk about the role of the medical profession after Passchendaele and the trench warfare of the first world war? We are commemorating those who lost their lives, but many of those who came home suffered from shellshock, and so many advances in psychiatry were made by dealing with that on the frontline and with the impact on families. Will that play any part in the commemoration of those who survived?

**John Glen:** Given our understanding of many of the impacts of war, certainly psychologically, we will have those things in mind as we remember the events of Passchendaele, but it is very difficult to go back and reinterpret events as they were at the time and as they were experienced at the time. The hon. Gentleman makes a perceptive and worthwhile point.

The Royal British Legion's National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire is also hosting a special service on 31 July, which will include a broadcast on large screens of our national event at Tyne Cot. Members on both sides of the House are encouraged to attend this free event, if they can. They should encourage their constituents to attend, too.

[John Glen]

More Victoria Crosses were won on the first day of the battle of Passchendaele than on any other single day of battle in the first world war, and 61 VCs were awarded during the campaign as a whole. All 61 recipients will be honoured with a commemorative paving stone in the town of their birth on the anniversary of the action for which the Victoria Cross was awarded. The commemorative paving stone initiative forms part of the Government's first world war centenary programme. In the case of those men born overseas, their commemorative paving stones have been placed at the National Memorial Arboretum.

Passchendaele also saw Captain Noel Chavasse, a medical officer, receive his second Victoria Cross. He was wounded on the first evening of Passchendaele but, under heavy fire and in appalling weather, he continued to search no man's land to attend to the wounded. On 2 August, while he was taking a rest, his first aid post was struck by a shell. Although he had at least six injuries, he managed to crawl away and was picked up and taken to the 32nd casualty clearing station, Brandhoek, where he died on 4 August 1917.

We are also supporting Passchendaele at Home in partnership with the Big Ideas Company. There are over 400 graves in the UK that are very likely to belong to servicemen injured at the battle of Passchendaele who died of their wounds afterwards. The project will work with schools and communities across the country to identify graves in their area and to find out more about the brave men who fought at Passchendaele.

As the House has heard, and I hope Members agree, these commemorative events to mark the battle of Passchendaele will be both educational and poignant, and they will help us to reflect on this terrible war and battle 100 years ago.

1.10 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): May I thank the Minister for his speech and, as this is my first opportunity to do so, may I welcome him to his new post? Although they have already left, may I, on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition, add our gratitude and thanks to Mr Nicholls and Mr Wright, the two police officers who helped to apprehend the killer of our beloved late colleague Jo Cox, whose plaque is now here behind me on Opposition side of the House? It is rightly standing with all the plaques of hon. Members who gave their lives on behalf of the country in previous conflicts, including the first world war.

Across this House, we are immensely grateful for the opportunity to commemorate Passchendaele, the third battle of Ypres, and the chance to speak of our military history, our armed forces communities, and the sacrifices that were made, and are still made, on our behalf. I should also like to take the opportunity, on behalf of the official Opposition, to pay tribute to those who have served in our armed forces and those who continue to serve. We are all grateful for their courage, as they serve to keep us safe.

As we have heard, the battle of Passchendaele stretched from July to November 1917, as the allied forces and the German empire battled for control of the ridges around Ypres on the western front. It was the first

major British offensive on the Ypres Salient. The stalemate lasted for months, marked by the battles within the battles of Menin Road Bridge, Polygon Wood, and Broodseinde. As has been said, the casualties on both sides are difficult to calculate, but there were well over half a million, and yet the village of Passchendaele itself was only 5 miles away from the starting point of the allied forces' action.

The battle is notorious, not only for the number of casualties, but for the conditions in which it was fought. The first few days of the offensive were marked by the heaviest rainfall in 30 years, turning the field into a quagmire which trapped soldiers and horses, and immobilised weaponry. A century on, in the safety and grandeur of this place, it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine the mud, the blood and the horror, and the sheer scale of the losses of Passchendaele—but that is why it is absolutely right that we remember.

There were 325,000 allied casualties, a fact that is difficult to comprehend, as is their bravery, valour, and sacrifice. In the minds of many, Passchendaele has come to epitomise the senselessness of war. So these moments of commemoration are important, and I would like to join the Minister in thanking all of those involved: the Imperial War Museum; the BBC; the Royal British Legion; the Commonwealth War Graves Commission; and all the other organisations, including those he mentioned, that work so hard to ensure that we do not forget. We are fortunate at the moment to have an exhibition in the Palace, in Westminster Hall, about Parliament and the first world war, which I encourage all hon. Members to visit if they have not already done so.

The scale of the great war was such that, today, most cities, towns, and villages have a memorial that lists the names of the local people who died while fighting for Britain in that war. Members will not be surprised to hear me, as a Welsh MP, observe that the sacrifices made in the first world war continue to resonate in Wales, despite the passage of 100 years. The first significant losses of Welsh life came during October and November of 1914. The Germans rushed for Belgian seaports, but were repelled by units of the Welch Regiment and the South Wales Borderers, who suffered many casualties. The Minister made reference to the fact that of all the events of that war, Passchendaele, in particular, is a part of Welsh cultural memory: every village in Wales was affected; 20,000 first-language Welsh-speaking soldiers alone were killed; the soldiers of the Welch Regiment, South Wales Borderers and Royal Welsh Fusiliers all fought alongside each other in the 38th Division; and further, the Welsh Guards fought at this, the third battle of Ypres. The 38th Division was devised by David Lloyd George, who went on to become Prime Minister, whose statue flanks the entrance to this Chamber and who was himself a first language Welsh speaker. The division first shipped to France in 1915 and suffered heavy casualties in the Somme. By 1917, it had come to be seen as an elite division, particularly following the battle of Pilckem Ridge at the beginning of the third battle of Ypres. The De Sportsman cafe at Langemark, not far from Ypres, has been dedicated by the owner, Marc Dacastecker, to the many Welsh soldiers who died in the area in 1917. The red dragon on a black background worn by the 38th Division is the inspiration for the shoulder flash worn by the Royal Welsh today, a testament to the cultural significance of the 38th Division.

It is for reasons such as this that sacrifice and public service are commemorated today right across the UK, but particularly by the armed forces community in Wales in relation to Passchendaele. When contemplating casualties on such a huge scale, we often turn to individual stories in remembrance, as the Minister did and as I would like to do. As the Minister said, it is 100 years since Passchendaele, and it is also a 100 years since Eisteddfod y Gadair Ddu, the Eisteddfod of the Black Chair. Some hon. Members will know that the Eisteddfod is the annual Welsh-language cultural festival where people compete at singing, dancing, and reciting poetry. It is held every summer; this year's will be held in only a few weeks' time, and I am pleased to say that next year's will be a free event in the capital city of Cardiff, where my constituency lies.

In 1916, some people called for the Eisteddfod to be cancelled, as they did not think it would be appropriate to spend time singing while men were fighting and dying on their behalf in the trenches. But David Lloyd George insisted. He said:

"It is true that there are thousands of gallant men falling in the fight—let us sing of their heroism... Let us sing of our land that gave birth to so many heroes".

So in 1916, the Eisteddfod went on. The following year, in 1917, as the battle of Passchendaele wore on, the Eisteddfod was directly touched by the tragedy of war. Ellis Humphrey Evans, under the now-famous pseudonym, Hedd Wyn, was judged as the winner of the Chair, the Eisteddfod's highest honour, granted to the best poet writing in traditional strict meter, known as *cynghanedd*. However, when the winner's pseudonym was called in the traditional dramatic ceremony at the Eisteddfod, no one stood up in the audience to reveal themselves as the triumphant poet. It was then announced that the winning bard had been killed in battle six weeks prior. Hedd Wyn had been one of 4,000 men killed on a single morning when the Royal Welsh Fusiliers went over the top near Passchendaele, in the Battle of Pilckem Ridge. The poet from Trawsfynydd has become the subject of poems and history lessons in classrooms across Wales, and even of an Oscar-nominated feature film. The poignant story of Hedd Wyn captured the mourning of a nation.

So in a way it is doubly appropriate that the Front-Bench lead in this debate today is the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, because in the greatest perils, it is poetry, songs and the arts that often keep people going, and miraculously, even though we would not want this to happen, manage to turn the horrors of war into the beauty of artistic inspiration.

The war effort in the UK was made up of not only the men who went to fight, but the surgeons and nurses on the battlefields. At home, women became the backbone of industry. Here, I would like to mention my own constituency. In 1917, the Women's Land Army formed and 20,000 women across the UK enlisted. Green Farm, in the Ely area of my Cardiff West constituency, is now a housing estate, which was built to deliver homes "fit for heroes" after the great war. As a farm, it was run predominantly by female farm hands during the war. One of the workers, Agnes Greateorex, left domestic service to work on the farm. She said:

"Every morning, we would get up at five o'clock and milk a hundred cows. We would then take the milk to Glan Ely Hospital."

I am proud—I am sure that we are all proud—of the efforts of Agnes and of so many women across the country. Of course, Agnes is part of Cardiff West's history, but I am both proud of and humbled by the sacrifices that we still see from our armed forces communities across the UK today.

The UK armed forces continue to protect us. They are currently involved in more than 30 operations in over 20 countries. Abroad, our forces continue to work in Afghanistan, in non-combat roles. They support the EU and UN in peacekeeping missions in South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, and Mali. They are part of NATO's forces in eastern Europe, and, as we heard earlier today in the House, are responding to the continuing threat posed by Daesh.

At home, they support responses to terrorist incidents, protect our aerospace, and are supported by the entire armed forces community of families, reservists, veterans, and cadets. During this debate to commemorate the sacrifices made in Passchendaele, we should also remember the sacrifices that have been made, and are still being made, every year since then by the brave men and women of the UK armed forces.

To close, I turn to the words of Hedd Wyn's "Rhyfel", which means war. I will read it in Welsh and then in the English translation.

Mae'r hen delynuau genid gynt,  
Yng nghrog ar gangau'r helyg draw,  
A gwaedd y bechgyn lond y gwynt,  
A'u gwaed yn gymysg efo'r glaw.  
The harps to which we sang, are hung  
On willow boughs, and their refrain  
Drowned by the anguish of the young  
Whose blood is mingled with the rain.

1.22 pm

**Mr Keith Simpson** (Broadland) (Con): May I begin by thanking the Minister for outlining the various ceremonies that are to take place over the next two or three months to commemorate the battle of Passchendaele? I also thank the spokesman for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), for talking about the wider impact of the war, which we are also commemorating.

It seems to me that, at times, this commemoration is a bit like the first world war in that, year by year, we remember another campaign, another battle. I wanted to speak in this debate for a number of reasons. I am so old that I interviewed dozens of first world war survivors in the 1970s for a writing project—I published two or three books. I have a deep, connected memory of the first world war, as my grandfather served in it. As a member of the Prime Minister's advisory panel on the first world war, I am also conscious of the fact that we need to get the balance right—this point was made in an intervention on the Minister—between commemoration and not glorifying war. How do we bring the war to young people? I have a personal connection as I can remember talking to survivors of Passchendaele, but for my son, who is 26, the battle of Passchendaele is as far away from him as the battle of Waterloo.

Secondly, why are we remembering Passchendaele? Is it just because we have got into the habit of putting hooks on our commemoration? In other words, it was obvious that, in 2014, it was going to be the battle of

[*Mr Keith Simpson*]

Mons. We glided through 2015, but there was of course Gallipoli, which was very, very important to the Australians and the New Zealanders. The great irony there is that the Australians and New Zealanders played a far more important and significant role as part of the British Armies in Belgium and France in '16, '17 and '18 and, indeed, suffered far worse casualties. Now, in 2017, we are largely, but not wholly, commemorating Passchendaele. Next year, we will end up commemorating the great German Spring offensive, which nearly broke the allied line; the Hundred Days offensive, which was the more mobile campaign; and then the collapse of the Germans in October and November 1918. That is it—the end of the first world war, but of course it was not.

As the Minister pointed out, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission celebrates its centenary this year. It was the work of a remarkable man, Fabian Ware, who served with an ambulance unit—he was too old to serve in a frontline unit—in 1914. He was struck by the extent of the casualties and what was going to happen to them. Through the adjutant general, one of the chief of staff officers in the British Armies' general headquarters, he began to collect bodies together—he began some form of formalisation. In 1917, the Imperial War Graves Commission was established. Its work really began after the Armistice in 1918. As the Minister pointed out, Tyne Cot—named after a reference on a map—outside Passchendaele, became the largest cemetery for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Nearly 50,000 men are commemorated there, the majority of whom have no grave.

That brings me on to my next point, which is that, for younger people, Passchendaele is about the sheer extent of casualties. I suspect that it is also associated in their mind not only with poetry and literature, some of which we have heard, but with film and photographs. The great thing about the first world war—if there is a great thing—is that we can actually see it. There is cine film, which is slightly more difficult, and a raft of photographs, many of which were taken on the frontline. It was against King's regulations for servicemen to take cameras onto the frontline. Most of them ignored that, and sent their photographs back home, which has given us a graphic display of what happened.

I talk to children and young people about the war. They say to me, "Another three or four years and I would have been old enough to have fought in the war. How did those people endure that? What did the Government do to force them to fight in the British Armies in the first world war?" It comes as quite a surprise to them when I say that there was no conscription until 1916-17 and that the majority of the servicemen were volunteers—either Kitchener volunteers or they were in the territorial army. There was a pretty dramatic and drastic military discipline code—we know, for example, that dozens of British servicemen were executed in the first world war, some for cowardice and some for murder. What I was struck by all those years ago when I talked to veterans and read their diaries and letters—it was clear that many of them were appalled by the death of their friends and the suffering—was that they volunteered partly out of a local interest. Many of them served with their friends, volunteering to serve in pals battalions or to serve alongside men from the same village or even the

same streets. It was a Victorian concept of duty. Of course one of the most important stimulants and determinants in battle, which I was always told when teaching at Sandhurst by men who had done this, is small-group loyalty. They were doing it not for their battalion, but for the people in their section—I am talking about half a dozen people.

We must remember that Passchendaele, as the Minister and the shadow Minister pointed out, was not a one-day battle. It was a series of campaigns from the end of July right through until 10 November and was only one part of the work of the British Armies in Belgium and France in 1917.

The next point I want briefly to touch on is that one question that is asked, not just by young people but by people who are interested in the first world war, is why the generals were so stupid—the point made by the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn). I have never been particularly in that camp; what I try to remember is that they came from a limited background and had limited experience and perception of war. We also need to bear in mind that the British expeditionary force of 1914—mainly regular and reservist, with a few TA—was about 150,000 men. Douglas Haig commanded a tiny part of that. In 1917, the British Armies in France were roughly 1.3 million men—an enormous expansion in war. Many were not soldiers; they were on the logistics or support side. To use a modern academic term, the learning curve required to recruit, train, deploy and fight these armies was enormous.

That was the experience not just in Britain but in Belgium, France, Germany and Russia, and I have to say that bearing in mind the extent of the casualties at Passchendaele—we are talking about perhaps 500,000 to 600,000 men, give or take 10,000, and that sounds appallingly inaccurate—we need to think about this in terms of the casualties of the second world war. To give just one example, historians now tell us that the average British infantry battalion in Normandy had more casualties than its equivalent in France in 1917. Passchendaele was unique in one sense, but there is a commonality in major war on a vast scale.

Then there is the question of the coalition Prime Minister mentioned by the Opposition spokesman, David Lloyd George, and what became the battle of the memoirs—involving Lloyd George, Churchill and the politicians on one side and the generals on the other—about who was responsible for the casualties and whether there was an alternative. Lloyd George wanted, for very good reasons, to avoid engaging the German enemy in the main theatre of operations, the western front. He was always looking for a way to knock the props out from under Germany. On the whole, the generals were against that. As far as they were concerned, the main battle was in Belgium and France, where we were a subordinate and then an equal partner of the French. There is no doubt in my mind that Lloyd George had, in theory, the power to have halted the campaign in third Ypres after the first month, when General Gough's army ground to a halt in the foulest of weather. He had that power—except he did not, because he felt weak up against Douglas Haig. Haig had the press on his side, and they were on his side until the end.

The debate is still going on today among historians about whether there was an alternative. There probably was not, but we did not have in place the methods and

organisation to have proper debates about such matters during the first world war. That was the big lesson that Churchill learned. Churchill, of course, left the Government after Gallipoli, and went and served in France before Lloyd George reluctantly brought him back as Minister of Munitions. When Churchill became Prime Minister in May 1940, the one lesson he had learned from the first world war was that the Prime Minister pretty much had to have total power. He therefore made himself Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, but he also sought to have a continuous day-by-day debate with the chiefs of staff over the full range of strategy and to use Government Committees to run the war. Churchill was in many respects a dictator, but almost without exception he never overruled the chiefs of staff.

Lloyd George did not have that ability. Not only did the Navy not talk to the Army, but Lloyd George had great difficulty pinning down the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Wully Robertson, the only man to go from working-class private to head of the Army and a field marshal. His contempt for Lloyd George was such that at one meeting he walked out; he just decided he was not going to continue the debate. These are the kinds of things with which I try to get young people engaged—issues that are still alive today.

My final point concerns the sorrow and pity of war. Putting aside the plans and personalities of the senior officers, the battle of Passchendaele was defined by two things as much as anything. The sheer weight of artillery firepower was on such a scale that it totally dwarfed anything that had taken place at the battle of the Somme. We are talking about an ability to bring down box artillery firepower in very small areas, and my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) has illegally shown us photographs of what Passchendaele looked like. The second element was the two periods of atrocious weather—absolute downpours of rain that ground everything to a halt. That is a phenomenon that we cannot deal with today.

If Members want to think about the impact of firepower, they should read the book “We Were Warriors” by our colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer). It is based on his three tours of operation in Afghanistan as a Royal Artillery officer attached to the Royal Marines. Members can see in that book that despite all the technology we now have—the firepower and the Cobra and Apache helicopters—it is still difficult, and there is an overwhelming desire not to kill or injure civilians.

I welcome this commemorative debate and I know that colleagues on both sides of the House will contribute to it. With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to read out two short contemporaneous accounts that combine the shellfire and the strain on soldiers. The first is from Britain and Private Bert Ferns of 2nd/6th Lancashire Fusiliers, describing an attack in October 1917—in other words, halfway through the Passchendaele campaign. He said that Mr Kay—obviously a platoon officer—

“came up and said ‘Come on lads, it’s our turn,’ and we just walked round the corner of the pillbox and up the hill. The Germans didn’t have much to fear from me that morning—there was no fire in my belly—no nothing. I staggered up the hill and...froze and became very frightened because a big shell had just burst and blown a group of lads to bits; there were bits of men all over the place, a terrible sight, men just blown to nothing. I just stood there. It was still and misty, and I could taste their

blood in the air. I couldn’t move. I stood there staring. Then an officer came across and shouted we were too far left and must go half right. I would have probably been dead but for him jolting me out of it. These men had just been killed and we just had to wade through them to get on. That’s one thing I’ll never forget, what I saw and what I smelt.”

The second short account is from the other side of the hill, as Basil Liddell Hart would have said, and a letter from an unknown German officer dated 20 September 1917:

“Dear Mother,

On the morning of the 18th, the dug-out, containing seventeen men, was shot to pieces over our heads. I am the only one who withstood the maddening bombardment of three days and still survives. You cannot imagine the frightful mental torments I have undergone in those few hours. After crawling out through the bleeding remnants of my comrades and the smoke and debris, and wandering and fleeing in the midst of the raging artillery fire in search of refuge, I am now awaiting death at any moment.

You do not know what Flanders means. Flanders means endless endurance. Flanders means blood and scraps of human bodies. Flanders means heroic courage and faithfulness, even unto death.

Your Otto.”

I do not know whether he survived.

1.39 pm

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson), who made an incredibly forensic, heartfelt and vivid speech—his two read-outs at the end were particularly emotional—and the House is better informed as a result of it, so I thank him most sincerely. I also thank the Minister for bringing the debate to the House, and pay tribute to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), who made a very fine speech.

It is absolutely right that we commemorate Passchendaele; the word is a trigger that brings up what it meant to go through industrial warfare. The sacrifice paid then must of course never be forgotten, and we pay tribute to all the bodies mentioned by the Minister that will take part in the commemoration services this year. Commemoration is of course important. It is always important to commemorate the large-scale loss of human life, as we do this week on the 22nd anniversary of the genocide at Srebrenica. We welcome the fact that the families of those lost in the battle of Passchendaele will have the opportunity to take part in these commemorations.

In Scotland, no community, and barely a family, was untouched by the carnage of Passchendaele. This tragedy highlights, as do many other tragedies, the importance of international and institutional peacebuilding and co-operation, shared values, shared interests, and working together to ensure that war does not become the norm of our time.

I turn to Glasgow, as I am sure that you will have expected me to, Madam Deputy Speaker, given that I am a Glasgow Member of Parliament. I understand that another honourable friend from Glasgow, the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), may wish to catch your eye to touch on our city’s heritage and history in this respect. I would like to mention something fascinating that I came across on the website of the Scottish Football Museum, which is based in Hampden Park in my constituency. I would like to tell the House about an individual you can read more about

[*Stewart Malcolm McDonald*]

on the website, or in the museum: the former Rangers player, Jimmy Speirs. His face will front the centenary commemoration of the Scots who did not make it back from Passchendaele. On 19 August, the unveiling of the life-sized steel silhouettes in Frezenberg will feature Jimmy Speirs, one of the many Glaswegians who never made it back from Passchendaele.

In addition to the excellent archives of the Scottish Football Museum, there is the fantastic portal at Glasgow University, which mentions a number of very distinguished people; I could read out their biographies and tell hon. Members lots about their lives, but there are a small handful that I would like to inform the House of. The first is Lachlan Seymour Graham, who was born in Glasgow on 19 September 1882. His father, Duncan, was a well-known Glasgow leather manufacturer with an interest in politics and public life. He was one of the founding members of the Glasgow Liberal Club, a past president of the eighth and Broomielaw municipal wards, the director of the Glasgow Agricultural Society, and a keen cricketer and golfer.

Seymour went up to the University of Glasgow in 1900 to begin an arts degree. He took many subjects, including Latin, logic, law and moral philosophy. In his final years in arts, he discovered his strong suit: he did extremely well in political economy and James Irvine's civil law class. Perhaps it was that success that encouraged him to take up law. After graduating in 1905, he matriculated again for Scots law, and over the next few years he gradually put together a bachelor of law. He graduated for a second time in 1910. It was while he was forging his way in the legal profession that he decided to join up. Seymour took a commission as second lieutenant in the 7th Highland Light Infantry. It was at Passchendaele, the very name of which evokes so much loss—loss that hon. Members have adumbrated this afternoon—that he was fatally wounded. Lieutenant Graham died on 29 August 1917.

Again in my constituency, there was George Ernest Main, the second son of an oil refiner, George B. Main of Pollockshields on the south side of Glasgow. He was educated at Glasgow University from 1907, and prior to that at the Glasgow Academy. Despite excelling in political economy, he was not able to pass his examinations in Latin, maths or constitutional law and left without completing his degree. By the time the war had broken out, he had begun to study for the ministry at the United Free Church's Divinity Hall.

Then there is Walter Ramsay Scott, born on 28 April 1893 in Pollockshaws, which was then part of Renfrewshire and not the city of Glasgow. He was the son of Robert Scott, a cashier, and Margaret Scott, and lived at 23 Barrington Drive, Glasgow, Lanarkshire.

It can be too easy, when we discuss these types of events, to remember numbers rather than people. I have selected a small number of extraordinary Glaswegians who took part in, and paid the ultimate price at, the battle of Passchendaele. Behind all those names are not just men, distinguished in education, politics, and public and military life, but their families—the children, wives, sisters and mothers who were left behind. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) makes an important point: it is absolutely correct to remember the dead and wounded,

but what about those who supported our brave soldiers? What about the nurses, doctors, and those who were supporting people with mental health problems? They too have a rightful place in any commemoration of not just Passchendaele but any other major conflict with an enormous loss of life.

I pay tribute to the Government's efforts in this commemoration. As a Glaswegian, I am very pleased and proud that the first of the Government's first world war commemorative events was in Glasgow cathedral; there is no finer cathedral anywhere in the United Kingdom. [*Interruption.*] I hear other suggestions being made from a sedentary position. On behalf of the people of Glasgow—this will, I am sure, be reinforced by the new hon. Member for Glasgow North East—I say: we remember and salute these people, and thank their families for their sacrifice.

1.48 pm

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): In debates of this sort, we have a tradition of fine oratory and thoughtful contributions, which we have certainly had today. I was interested in the intervention of the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock); he rightly raised the issue of tone, which was the first question considered at the very beginning of this commemorative period, when the Government were drawing up their plans for the four-year centenary, because really on that hinges all the rest. Commemoration and celebration are phonetically very similar, but semantically they are very different indeed, and throughout this period the Government have rightly insisted that this is commemoration, most certainly not celebration.

Earlier in this commemorative period, we had to address issues such as whether this was a just war in Augustinian terms. Was it the right thing to do, and was it worth the price? Those are two very different things.

In Augustinian terms, it was a just war. It satisfied all the preconditions for a just war, and it is as well that it was a war that was won. But who among us would have signed up to such a thing if we had known in advance what the dreadful cost of the war would have been? We are reminded of that cost every day as we arrive here, when we look at our own war memorial at the end of Westminster Hall. That is replicated right across the country in our war memorials, which characterise every single settlement in the British Isles. It was a cost, indeed, and one that I suspect few of us today would be prepared to countenance.

The third battle of Ypres became known as Passchendaele. The word evokes such powerful sentiment, despite the fact that it was the part of the campaign that was right at the very tail end of the engagement. The battle began relatively well. It was preceded by Messines, of which we were reminded last week as we commemorated the death of a former Member of Parliament, Major Willie Redmond, who died at 56—think of that—at that particular battle. He was a truly great man, and his death reminds us of the great waste of life and lost opportunity.

In the Minister's excellent opening speech, he rightly mentioned Francis Ledwidge, the so-called poet of the blackbirds, and Hedd Wyn, the bard of the black chair, who died at Pilckem Ridge. The hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, was quite right to point out



that this cultural loss of wonderful creative men really brings home what a wasteful period in our history this war was. Just think of what the world might have been had those men lived to become fathers, grandfathers, doctors, poets and artists—to achieve their full potential. It is almost unimaginable. Yet, that is where we are left as a result of this terrible war. According to A.J.P. Taylor, third Ypres was

“the blindest slaughter of a blind war.”

We have heard that close on a quarter of a million British and British empire troops were either killed or injured between 31 July and 12 November; it was a similar number on the German side.

Basil Liddell Hart was writing in the 1930s, when he said that Passchendaele was synonymous with military failure and that it was “black-bordered” in the annals of the British Army. He had some experience of serving in the trenches, and he wrote his great works on the subject between 1930 and 1934. I am particularly moved by the accounts of historians of that time because they could remember; it was pretty much fresh in their memory. As Hilary Mantel has pointed out so recently in her Reith lectures, the difficulty with history is that it seems to change all the time. As generations go by, they seem to reinterpret history all the time. Well, Liddell Hart was reporting more or less in near time with his own recollections. I hope my right hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) would agree that, when examining the historical record, we need to have a particular mind to those who were writing very close to the great war. They were there and had seen it with their own eyes. They were not seeing it through the fog of a century or so, as we now are.

According to Liddell Hart, Lieutenant General Sir Launcelot Kiggell, when driving up to the front line in his staff car, is meant to have said, “Good God, did we really send men to fight in that?” Nick Lloyd’s book “Passchendaele: A New History” was published this year, and his more contemporary account suggests that that was apocryphal. That may be the case, but it certainly served the narrative that this was a war all about chateau generals sending other men’s sons to die in terrible circumstances—a narrative that prevailed in the 1960s when we were commemorating the 50th anniversary of the conflict, and which has only recently been corrected.

Public appetite for this material appears to be pretty much insatiable. The Government have been surprised by the level of interest that the centenary has provoked. We have never done this sort of thing before, so we had no real idea at the beginning how much interest there would be in the material and, frankly, how sustainable it would be. Well, the public have surpassed all our expectations, as they are proving to be incredibly receptive. Evidence suggests that one of the legacies of this centenary period will be a greatly improved level of understanding of this seminal period in our recent history. All the evidence suggests that people better understand the circumstances that led up to the great war, and the conduct of that war. As we get further into the centenary, the right questions are being asked. People are asking, “What does this actually mean?” and “How does it impact on how we live today?” The big question, of course, is “How on earth do we prevent it from ever happening again?”

When we come to examine all this investment in time and effort over the four years, we should also look at the diplomatic deliverables. The value of commemorating

shared history has really struck me. Some of this is actually quite uncomfortable, and it can be uncomfortable in surprising places. Our relationship, for example, with what is now the Republic of Ireland—more than our relationship with Germany—has been advanced quite significantly over this period. When we hear people in the Republic of Ireland talking about the service of their forebears in the uniform of George V, we know that something has changed. They would not have talked openly about that or displayed those campaign medals a generation ago. That is truly remarkable, despite the fact that a lot of this history is painful for many people, so the centenary underscores the importance of commemorating history, warts and all, and ensuring that at no point do we attempt to airbrush or finesse it.

Throughout the four years, we have focused on young people for obvious reasons. It was people of their age who, 100 years ago, were right at the forefront of all the action. It is salutary to stand at a place such as Tyne Cot and watch the reaction of young people arriving on bus tours. These are typically cynical youths, but not when looking around a place such as Tyne Cot. Just look at their faces; the penny has dropped, because they are looking at row on row of headstones above the remains of people their own age. One of the most powerful things we have done as part of the battlefield tours is to ensure, wherever we possibly can, the presence of a contemporary serviceman, so that the connection can be made. One benefit from initiatives of that sort is better understanding on the part of those young people who, with the contraction of our armed forces these days, perhaps do not have the first-hand connection with the armed forces that our generation might have had. That is an incredibly powerful thing, which brings the events alive to today’s young men and women.

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I pay tribute—I am sure, on behalf of the whole House—to all the work that my hon. Friend has done personally to help to commemorate the first world war. He has put in a tremendous amount of time and effort, and it is right to acknowledge that today. He was talking about young people. I am sure he would agree that it is vital that young people of today’s generation are able to learn about the tremendous sacrifice that was made so that they could live in a free country. Therefore, will he join me in commending FitzWimarc School, Sweyne Park School and Beauchamps High School in my constituency for all the work they have done to organise tours so that their young people can go to the battlefronts of the first world war, and learn about the importance of sacrifice?

**Dr Murrison:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The thing that impresses one most of all about this commemorative period is the extraordinary amount of work that has been done right across the country—some of it sponsored and assisted by the Government, some of it not, and some of it quite spontaneous in its evolution. Together, that forms a wonderful patchwork of commemorative activity, and it just shows the passion the public have for commemorating this period in our history. That suggests to me that there will, indeed, be a very rich legacy when we come towards the end of our four years.

**Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend for the extraordinary work he has done to ensure that this commemoration period

[Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan]

is given as wide a reach as it can be. Last year, he encouraged me to look at the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers—the young men from my constituency who went out to fight in the first world war. Those boys and young men were the same age as my son is now, which brings this home very bluntly to me. Last November, I went out to northern Italy to lay a wreath at the war graves at Tezze, in northern Italy. By chance, a group of Italian students of 17 and 18 was visiting. They had never been in the cemetery before, but they saw a woman in a red coat with a wreath, and they were curious, so they came over. Their teacher, who spoke perfect English, asked me to explain why I was there and why British soldiers had been fighting in their country. These children had had very little education about the first world war, because the fascist regime altered the way history was taught in Italy. To a young man and young woman, they were absolutely transfixed. They were enormously appreciative of, and slightly overwhelmed by, the fact that young men had come from far away—in this case, from Berwick in Northumberland—to fight for freedom. I commend my hon. Friend for the efforts he has made, which have given us the opportunity to share these things with those children across the water.

**Dr Murrison:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and she is absolutely right. That gives me the opportunity to say that this is, of course, not just about the western front. I am pleased that she mentioned Italy. It is important, as part of this four-year commemorative period, that people do come to appreciate that the first world war was, indeed, a world war, and the Italian campaign is an important part of that.

May I also mention centenary interns while I am talking about young people? I hope this project will become an important part of our presence on what was the western front for people wishing to visit commemorative sites. The Canadians have, for a long time, had young people guiding visitors from Canada around sites on the western front that are particularly important to Canadians. It struck me that if the Canadians can do so well from a distance of 3,000 miles, we can probably do something rather similar from a distance of 200 miles. Right now, we have established the first tranche of our centenary interns, who will guide people around the principal sites for us—Tyne Cot and Thiepval—under the supervision of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. When colleagues and others visit the western front and the cemeteries and sites of importance in northern France and Belgium, I hope they will look out for the very obvious orange T-shirt uniforms of our centenary interns. Those I met last week when I visited Tyne Cot were people of exceptional quality, and I am sure people will be very pleased to see them and to be guided by them around those sites.

It is remarkable that the third battle of Ypres was not only preceded by Messines—a victory that I think encouraged Hague in his dialogue with Lloyd George—but succeeded the success at Cambrai, which was remarkable for another reason, in that it introduced mechanised warfare realistically for the first time on the western front. That was the gathering note for what became a far more kinetic stage in the last 100 days of the war.

For most people in this country, what makes Passchendaele special, as it were, is the mud and blood. It was quite different from the Somme, which resulted in far more casualties. That mud was caused by rain, of course, but also by the inundation of Flanders following the barrage of artillery that completely destroyed all the dykes and engineering that held back the sea from that part of the world. Flanders is, of course, pasture land, and crops cannot be grown there, because it is far too wet. The reason it can be utilised for agricultural purposes at all is that it has an advanced system of water engineering. Bombardment means that that is completely destroyed. It was not for the first time in the first world war that the British Army knew the full consequences of the destruction of that system. The combination of heavy rainfall and the destruction of civil engineering in that area made it a complete quagmire, which gave Passchendaele its particular awfulness.

I would like to finish on a contemporary note. In two weeks' time, many of us will be privileged to attend the commemorations in Ypres and Tyne Cot. We will stand there among the row upon row of headstones, we will look at the Menin Gate, with its rank upon rank of names carved in stone, and we will be left with a sense of wonder. We will try to work out what it all means. In the context of the debate we are having about our future in Europe, one wonders perhaps what others think of us, too. There are those in Europe who say that this country is somehow less than European—that we are poor Europeans. I would just say this: it has always been the case, and it is the case now—this country was certainly demonstrating this full well 100 years ago—that there is no country in Europe that is more engaged in Europe than the United Kingdom.

I would just ask colleagues, as they look among those headstones and gaze up among those names carved in stone, to reflect on this country's contribution to European history. Whether we are Brexiteers or not—and I am a completely signed-up Brexiteer—we need to understand that we are Europeans; that is what we have always been, and that is what will always be. We should take absolutely no nonsense from those who, for their own purposes, try to suggest that we are in some way disengaged from Europe. I am proud of our history. This country has always been there when Europe needed us—when we needed to face down the general disturber of the peace. I am confident that we will continue to do just that.

Two weeks' time will be a solemn time for our country. The media will most certainly be focused on Tyne Cot and Ypres. We will be among friends in Belgium—a country that is extraordinarily sympathetic to this country and a good friend of ours. It is important that, whenever we have the opportunity, we reinforce in the minds of our friends and neighbours in Europe our solidarity and comradeship with them. There can be no more enduring testament to that European engagement than the Menin Gate in Ypres and Tyne Cot at Zonnebekke.

2.8 pm

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Each time we have these debates, they get nearer to the reality of the first world war. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) quoted Eisteddfod y Gadair Ddu, which is renowned in Wales as commemorating Hedd Wyn and that touching symbol he used:

“A'u gwaed yn gymysg efo'r glaw”—

their blood mixed with the rain. We could see that in the imagery presented by the right hon. Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) in the two poems he quoted. We must see the lesson of this terrible event from the first world war and learn from it.

There has been one visual aid this afternoon, and the picture I have here shows my father—Machine Gunner James Flynn. He was not a distinguished soldier, but one who volunteered because he was a great patriot. He had soaked up all the propaganda that was around at the time, and he went there to sort out the Hun. He went as a volunteer at the age of 15; he lied about his age. He went through the whole lot—the Somme and Passchendaele. Eventually he was captured by the Germans, to his great relief, because he was dying after being hit by a mortar; he was in a shell hole and could not get out of it. He was eternally grateful to the Germans for the rest of his life—he lived to 43—because of the care they gave him. They carried him across no man's land after the breakthrough by the Germans in 1918 and saved his life. He went out there to kill Germans, and he came back as a great admirer of the Germans who saved his life.

I was struck by a poem that the right hon. Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) quoted in a previous debate, because it illustrates the truth of the first world war. It is one brief stanza by Rudyard Kipling, who was of course a great cheerleader for the war and all patriotic causes—so much so that he managed to pull a few strings to make sure that his son, who had defective eyesight, could pass the test to get in to become a soldier and then lost his life. Rudyard Kipling had a picture of what would happen when he died and went to heaven, and was forced to see the people he had encouraged to go to war and lose their lives. He said:

“I could not dig: I dared not rob:  
Therefore I lied to please the mob.  
Now all my lies are proved untrue  
And I must face the men I slew.  
What tale shall serve me here among  
Mine angry and defrauded young?”

The youth of that generation were defrauded by the senior generation of officers and politicians. Although they were not wicked people, they had all kinds of heroic delusions.

We must not see Passchendaele through the fog of a belief in a false idea of heroism: it was not like that. It rapidly became a terrible scene of slaughter where men died like cattle and lives were not counted, with 16 million deaths. What is our lesson, and have we learned it yet? I doubt if we have, because today we have heard the word “wonderful” used about that battle. What it can mean, I have no idea. There is no way that anyone can describe the first world war as anything other than a terrible, terrible mistake and a series of tragedies.

**Sir William Cash:** The use of the word “wonderful” in this context is about admiration for the heroism and for the courage. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) used the word “wonder” with regard to how we feel when we look at what happened. Today happens to be the anniversary of my own father's death in the battle of Hill 112, shortly after Maltot, on 13 July 1944. I have personal experience of this; I know that the hon. Gentleman has referred to his father.

The word “wonderful” in this context is about admiration for the heroism and for the courage, and I am not going to resile from that.

**Paul Flynn:** I think it is entirely true to say that there is a nobility in the soldier's craft and the soldier's sacrifice, and we are grateful for that to this day. We see in Kosovo and Sierra Leone, with the humanitarian work that was done there, acts that are absolutely defensible and in which we can take a great pride. We have had a marvellous military history, and much of it showed the best of human nature. I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman on that.

But what are we learning today? We should look at what happened in this Chamber in 2006, when a decision was made to send troops into Helmand at a time when only half a dozen of our soldiers had been killed there. We had already been there for nearly six years, since 2001. We went in in the belief that not a shot would be fired. The result was that 450 of our soldiers died there. We have yet to face up to the reality of that. Was it a mistake by us? The Chilcot report came out. A year later, Lord Chilcot has had to repeat some of the lessons that he drew from it, because those lessons have been glossed over. There has been a spinning of the reality of his conclusions. That is partly because so many people in this Chamber at the time were part of a mistake in our joining the Iraq war. We could not stop the war happening, but we could have stopped Britain's involvement in it, which would have avoided the deaths of 179 of our soldiers.

**Sir William Cash:** I would like to slightly pursue this point with the hon. Gentleman, because there is probably not much difference between us in terms of the sentiments that lie behind his reasons for advancing rather different arguments. I simply make the point that although the pity of war, as it was so aptly put, is a terrible thing, we have to reflect on the fact that sometimes it is necessary. Unprovoked aggression, as indeed we experienced in the second world war, does lead to our having to fight back, and that necessarily involves the cost of people's lives, like my father and others. When defining the boundaries of this matter, we must be very careful to ensure that we do not go overboard in suggesting that somehow the whole war is in itself unacceptable, because unfortunately it is a fact of life. We do have to fight back and respect and admire the heroism of those who take part.

**Paul Flynn:** There really is no difference between us. I never suggested that there were not entirely justifiable wars.

We should be recalling what lessons we have learned from Passchendaele and the rest of the first world war in the decisions we take in this House now. I once had five weeks' enforced absence from this House for saying what I am about to say, although I will say it in a rather more delicate way. I said that Ministers of all kinds were mistaken in the claim they were making to potential soldiers that they could go to Afghanistan and thereby reduce the threat of terrorism in this country. I think that was an untruth, because the only reason the Taliban were killing our soldiers in Afghanistan was that we were there. Other people had an interest in terrorism here, but there was never any interest among the Taliban. Soldiers were called on to go there for that purpose, but it was not true. I believe we are still in a position where

[Paul Flynn]

politicians lie and soldiers die. Unless we can be frank with them, we are going to find that a generation will reject war.

It was interesting that General Dannatt said recently—a matter of days ago—that he did not want people to believe what Chilcot was saying because it would suggest to those who had lost loved ones in Iraq that they died in vain. But sadly that is probably the truth, because we had nothing to gain, unlike in the first world war. The main result of the first world war was the second world war; it was a terrible error. We have a duty to look at the opinions of the soldiers who fought at the time. None of them is alive now. The last one who died left us a message when he said that he thought that war was legalised murder. There are many other soldiers whose lives were destroyed by that war. Lives were shortened.

I feel particular pain in the case of my own father. His life was ruined by the war, and he could never do what he called a proper man's job again. In 1935, his pension was reduced by the Government, who said that his health problems—he went out there as a perfectly fit 15-year-old—were not attributable to his war wounds but were aggravated by them. That was a cheat by the Government, and he died a short time later. We do not have a record of treating our soldiers with gratitude, and that remains the case. The essence of this debate is that we should remember the truth of the first world war. We should never again repeat the old lie that it is sweet and decorous to die for the country. That is not true. It is an old lie to which, sadly, new people would like to give new credence.

2.20 pm

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I want to talk about the situation 100 years ago. At that time, one quarter of the vessels crossing the Atlantic were being sunk by U-boats coming from the Belgian coast. The Navy had warned the Government that unless something was done about it, we might collapse in 1918. The United States had entered the war on 6 April 1917, which was great from our point of view, but in May and June the French army was massively defeated by the Germans, resulting in a huge mutiny in its ranks. At the same time, the British generals wanted to break out of the Ypres Salient, so the Germans had very good reason to believe that they could win the war at that time. They felt that the Americans would not get into the war before they had won it. That is fairly true, because the American army was very small, a bit obsolete and did not have many weapons.

Field Marshal Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, desperately wanted to break out of the Ypres Salient where it had been stuck for several years. He wanted to get to the coast, because the strategic aim was to get to those U-boat pens and stop us being throttled by torpedo attacks.

The plan was simple. There was a preliminary operation, which other hon. Members have mentioned, to secure the southern flank of the British position. The first phase was to take out the railway junction at Roulers and to then swing around and advance towards the coast. That was the plan, but it went very badly wrong.

I want to talk about the soldiers. By mid-1917, machine guns had become what Correlli Barnett called the queens of the battlefield. They were devastating. The rifle by comparison was absolutely useless. The 1st Battalion

Cheshire Regiment, which I was to command 74 years later, had been equipped the previous year with 16 Lewis machine guns, which were pretty heavy: they were 28 lb, not including ammunition. Our soldiers had to carry them. Nobody really wanted to take a machine gun as they crossed the frontline, for two reasons: first, it made them an easy target and, secondly, its weight. They scurried across no man's land, going as fast as they could, but it was difficult to go fast in those conditions.

At the same time, by the start of the third battle of Ypres, Passchendaele, our soldiers had been issued with those awful helmets. They called them tin hats. I wore one when I first joined the Army—I am that old—and they were acutely uncomfortable and very heavy. Again, that made it difficult for our soldiers when they scrambled out of their frontline positions.

They had had one hell of a winter: 1916-17 had been incredibly cold. The soldiers received only one hot meal a day and it was usually supplied by the quartermaster in boxes lined with straw. They brewed tea themselves. They would usually fill old jam tins with grease and insert a wick to make a flame on which they would put a pot to heat up the water. Every day, the quartermaster tried to bring clean socks to the frontline positions, because trench foot was appalling. The conditions were so wet and the men needed to try to keep their feet dry, which was almost impossible.

It was good that some of the soldiers in my battalion were allowed leave. They went home and came back, but they knew damn well what they were coming back to. That is why they are heroes—because they came back. They came back from home, where they saw normality. War is not normality. War is disgusting and horrid, and it is something to be avoided. Heroism is going back to that because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) has said, they did not want to let their friends down.

Even then, in the middle of the war, when reinforcements were coming, those that were supposed to come to my battalion, the 1st Battalion Cheshires, were diverted. The battalion was on the frontline near Cambrai and one would think that, before the battle, it would be fully manned, but it was not. It did not even have enough troops to go along the front. It had to have little posts on the frontline, in the hope that they could cover the area in front of the battalion position.

They knew damn well what would happen when the signal for advance was given—they had been there long enough. On 31 July, very early in the morning, at 3.50, just as dawn was breaking, the battalion's officers blew the whistles. Can you imagine how absolutely terrified our soldiers were? They must have had a hell of a night up to that time. They were laden with ammunition, kit and Lewis machine guns. As H-hour—that is, the start time—was declared, some soldiers were being delivered by train right to the frontline. They disembarked and went straight across the start line and into battle.

When they went into no man's land, it was not a run. It was not even a walk. It was more like a crawl, I would think. No man's land was full of wire obstacles, which sometimes got worse under artillery fire. And then, within hours, the rain came—the worst rainfall for 30 years. The men could not even get into the shell holes, because they were full of water. They were sitting ducks. They were covered in filth, absolutely exhausted, trying to go forward. And that is what they did. Some of

them sank right down to their waists in the mud, and it took six soldiers to pull each of them out. Stretcher bearers could not move—there was no chance at all of them moving in that mud.

Our soldiers were not brave—of course they were brave, but what they really experienced was terror—and they thought that within minutes, within seconds, they would be dead. Perhaps they prayed that it would be a head shot. The soldier's prayer is a head shot, to die straight out, not a wound to the stomach or the abdomen, when no one can get to the wounded and they lie there in agony for hours or days, sometimes just slipping under the mud and drowning while they are at it.

I think I have some idea of what they felt, because I have advanced when someone beside me has been shot. I knew I had to go, because I had to go and get some civilians—I am talking about Bosnia—but I was not a hero; I was not brave, but bloody terrified. I was so terrified that I wet myself. That is not bravery, but what mattered was that we went forward and did our duty. Our soldiers did that. They did not want to die—it was the last thing they wanted to do. They wanted to survive.

Passchendaele was a stalemate for four months, while our men were sitting ducks. It was a disgusting, exhausting and traumatic experience for anyone who was there. It cost both sides dearly. I do not think we know the exact figures, but the British were about 310,000 dead and the Germans 260,000. That was the dead, but three times as many casualties survived. The ratio then was one dead to three wounded.

Haig later justified what happened by saying, "It was necessary. We could take more casualties than the Germans, because we had more resources. That made it worthwhile." Can anyone imagine a general today trying to give such a justification for the mass slaughter that occurred at Passchendaele? "I thought it was okay, because we could take more casualties than they could, so in the end we would win." We remember them all, British, German and Commonwealth, today.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call Mohammad Yasin to make his maiden speech.

2.33 pm

**Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech in this very important debate.

It seems fitting to pay tribute to the Bedfordshire Regiment whose men also fought at Passchendaele. Many did not come back home. It is not lost on me that the sacrifices made by those men 100 years ago led to the freedoms, rights and opportunities that I am proudly expressing today. I am deeply honoured not only to have been chosen by the people of Bedford and Kempston to represent them as their Member of Parliament, but to be the first ethnic minority candidate to do so.

I made the journey from Kashmir to Bedford in 1992. Soon I was married and working in a factory. Later I became a taxi driver, which I continued to do until my election to Parliament. I can honestly say that from the moment I arrived in Bedford, I made it my home—but ever since, it is Bedford that has made me. I am very thankful for that.

I wanted to do more for the community that had welcomed me, so I became a councillor for Queens Park ward in 2006. Earlier this year, I took the next step and

was selected by my party to stand as Labour's candidate. Many people said that I stood no chance and that Labour could not possibly win Bedford back. Bedford and Kempston proved them wrong. With the support of my friends and fellow councillors, and my wonderful family—I am so thankful to my wife, Shakila, my mother, my four children and my new grandson, Imad—we fought a campaign that delivered Bedford and Kempston back to Labour. I am immensely proud to be on the Labour Benches, whose shadow Cabinet has the highest number of ethnic minority MPs ever, which means that the population is more fairly represented than it has ever been before.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Richard Fuller, who has worked so hard over the past seven years for his community. The Bedford Community Business School set up by Richard has been a great success and is a legacy that he is rightly very proud of. I also thank Bedford's previous Labour MP, Patrick Hall, for his 13 years of dedicated service.

People from more than 50 countries of origin live and have settled in Bedford and Kempston, which has made the area the most ethnically diverse town in the United Kingdom in proportion to its size. All kinds of people have settled there, from the eastern Europeans and Italians who arrived after the second world war to help rebuild Britain through work in the Stewartby brickworks, to others like me who arrived more recently. It is that which makes my constituency so very special.

Bedford is warm, welcoming, neighbourly and compassionate. Difference and diversity of faith, colour and creed is not only tolerated but celebrated in this town. Churches, mosques, gurdwaras, faith groups and charitable organisations throughout my constituency work together to build upon that diversity and to support those who have been affected by so many years of austerity and damaging cuts.

Bedford has a strong arts scene. Our cultural heritage is celebrated in Bedford's many festivals, not least the biennial River festival that attracts a quarter of a million people to the beautiful riverside. We are also a town of sportspeople, with the Bedford Blues, the Eagles, and the Queens Park and Kempston cricket clubs. We have rowing clubs, sailing clubs and our international athletics track. We have been proud to produce gold Olympians and Paralympians, and then there is Iva Barr, who was still running the London marathon at the age of 88. Bedfordians are amazing people.

People talked to me a lot during the election, about their concerns about schooling, the cuts to policing and, above all, the NHS. At the very heart of our town is Bedford Hospital, where my children and grandson were born. I want to make sure that the hospital stays at the heart of my constituency. Two years ago, Bedford Hospital saved my wife's life when she suffered a heart attack. I can never repay the staff for all they did for us.

Let me say this now: the future of our hospital and its services have been in doubt for far too long. Since 2011, under this Government and the previous one, a string of expensive and inconclusive reviews have cast a shadow over the hospital, lining the pockets of management consultants while hard-working frontline staff have gone without pay rises. Threats to maternity, accident and emergency, and paediatrics make it hard to recruit and retain staff, and have caused much concern to the community.

[*Mohammad Yasin*]

As the As MP for Bedford and Kempston, I will fight every day to keep the services that we need in our growing town so that my constituents do not have to travel 15 or 20 miles to access life-saving services, or 60 miles to access justice if plans to close Bedford courts go ahead.

I want babies to continue to be born in Bedford and Kempston, where they can grow up in a fairer society, access equal opportunities and realise their true potential in families that feel proud and part of their community.

2.40 pm

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin). I congratulate him on his maiden speech. I am sure it is the first of many contributions as he represents his community in Bedford and I wish him well.

Today's debate is focused on the battle of Passchendaele. It has been described as a long campaign that took place over several months. It was an honour to be in the Chamber to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) describing the fear that he knows at first hand and what it is like to be in combat. He made a very powerful speech, and he has the respect of all of us for what he said.

I want to focus on a particular time in the battle. At the end of August 1917, Field Marshal Haig decided to replace General Gough With General Plumer. The website "War History Online" reports that General Plumer was an efficient, methodical commander. He had assembled an outstandingly competent staff, who had demonstrated their abilities as a team in a previous operation in Messines Ridge. There would be no rushing a meticulous planner like Plumer. He was told at the end of August 1917 that he was leading the next big attack and he took three weeks to prepare and plan. There was a lull in fighting while he gathered his resources. However, in that lull more than 10,000 men were killed in just over two weeks.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham said, the weather was atrocious, but for the first time that year it turned to the advantage of the British. The continuous rain that had turned the battlefield into a quagmire let up for 10 whole days. In the relatively dry ground, Plumer's men dug trenches and repaired roads.

The skills and techniques of artillerymen had been refined over the preceding three years, and Plumer made use of that. When his artillery opened fire at 5.40 on 20 September, they did so in planned formation. Guns were concentrated to provide one for every 5.2 yards of ground to be attacked. Infantry advanced behind the shelter of a creeping barrage, one of the great innovations of the war. A wall of explosions helped to hide them from the fire of their enemies and to force those enemies to keep their heads down.

Today, we are rightly discussing and commemorating people who sacrificed their lives on the battlefield. However, in my city of Leeds, which I am proud to represent, we have Barnbow armouries. In the first world war, we had the Leeds canaries—women who made the munitions that would have been used in the battle. They were called canaries because the TNT turned their skin yellow. They knew that they were being

poisoned and were likely to become sterile. Tragically, on Tuesday 5 December 1916, there was an explosion in which 35 women were killed instantly. They have been commemorated in this place previously, but I want to take the opportunity to do so again. When the explosion happened, the War Office realised that it could not release the names of the women in obituaries at the time because it did not want the enemy to know where the munitions were being made. Over the next year, one woman a week had her obituary in the *Yorkshire Post*. The obituaries glossed over what the women were doing. There were casualties back home as a result of involvement in the battles as well as people dying on the frontline.

**Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Richard Pinkett, a constituent from Belper, posts regularly on Facebook about people from Belper who died in the many different battles of the first world war. Belper is much bigger than it was and the posts show that not only the people who were killed in the battles but the families in the local region were affected. So many families in so many communities were affected by the deaths of their sons. My hon. Friend mentions the women who bravely helped. We should remember the people back home as well as those on the frontline. In Belper, a flag in the memorial garden is lowered to half-mast every time we commemorate 100 years since one of the young men died. It is a testament to local people that we do not forget those who died.

**Alec Shelbrooke**: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point so powerfully. We all have examples in our constituencies of people who were affected by the wars, and I am sure that we are all there on Remembrance Sunday to pay our respects, no matter how long ago the deaths occurred.

On 20 September 1917, there was an early morning mist and the temperature was about 66° F. The main thrust of the advance was on the Menin road, which led south-east across the ridge and toward the town of Menin. South of the road, the Germans put up heavy resistance, especially around their strong defence of Tower Hamlets. The advance was successful, but Tower Hamlets remained in German hands.

Remarkable advances were made on Menin road itself. The 11th Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire Regiment) and 69 Trench Mortar Battery took Inverness Copse, long a target of British attacks. Near Langemarck, the Germans held the strongly fortified positions of Eagle Farm and Eagle Trench. The task of driving them out initially fell to 11th Rifle Brigade, 12th Rifle Brigade, and 6th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. The 12th Rifles and the Light Infantry took Eagle Farm and moved on to seize the southern end of Eagle Trench. The 11th Rifles lost two thirds of their men before securing a section of the trench. For three days, Eagle Trench was divided between the Germans and the British.

I want to focus on 20 September 1917, the first day of the battle. When I was a child, our family visited the Tyne Cot cemetery, and on the memorial wall at the back are the words "Rifleman Harold Edward Shelbrooke, Kings Royal Rifle Corps". My great grandfather—Ted as he was known—was killed on the first day of the battle. Harold Edward Shelbrooke was born on Christmas eve 1883 and married in 1915. On 16 January 1916 his son, my grandfather, George Edward Shelbrooke, was born.

Ted had three sisters and he used to walk through the Blackwall tunnel to court May, my great grandmother. By profession, Ted was an umbrella maker. His family lived in Poplar. His father, my great great grandfather, was killed in a gas explosion at Poplar gas works in April 1891.

Ted joined up in April 1916 because he had been white-feathered in Greenwich and it had played on his mind. He was not liable to be called up under the Military Service Act 1916 because he was a married man. That all changed later, in June 1916, when the second Act was passed and married men were included, but he signed up before then. His wife pleaded with him not to do it and to think of the baby, but he was determined to serve his King and country and, more importantly, he understood the consequences of our sitting and not doing anything. He joined the King's Royal Rifle Corps, which was stationed at Winchester, and that is where he did his initial training. My family do not have his military records, so I am not sure when he embarked for France, but my aunt has a postcard dated 20 July 1916, when he was transferred to Seaford, Sussex, prior to embarkation. We know little more after that. His younger brother-in-law, John Culley, joined up with him aged 15. Uncle Jack was, in common parlance, a man of small stature, and he was only about 17 at the time of the battle. He was employed—I use the term loosely—as a bugler in the trenches, but he did fight.

Uncle Jack—as he was known—survived the war, dying in 1981. He told my grandfather, George, that he saw Ted being stretchered off when a shell burst near them, and Ted and the medics were not seen again. No one knows whether they were blown to pieces or fell into one of the flooded shell holes and drowned. His body was never found. That is why his name is on the wall at the back of the Tyne Cot cemetery, along with those of tens of thousands of other men whose bodies were never found.

May Shelbrooke, my great-grandmother, could not accept that Ted had died and his body had not been found. That very much plays into what many Members have said today about the lasting effects of the war. May wrote constantly to the British Red Cross for about three years to find out whether Ted had been taken prisoner. When she was sent the famous “war penny”, she threw it across the room, exclaiming, “I don't want a bloody penny. I want my husband.” She was well supported by her family, and she lived with them for the remainder of her life. She never remarried, and she died in January 1977. She had to work to support her son, so she got a job in the office of Charlton Glassworks, where she stayed until she retired.

May's son George became a precious member of the family and proved to be a bright child, but his grandmother was a strict matriarch and forbade him to take the entrance exam for John Roan Grammar School because she wanted him to leave school as soon as possible and work in a shop. That is another of the ongoing consequences of this terrible war. The only son of a widowed mother was told, “I am sorry, but you have to go out and provide for our family: you have to work.” To those who know me, it will come as no surprise that there is a streak of rebellion in my family. George rebelled at that, and when he left school at 14, he found a job as a laboratory technician in an oil company on the Isle of Dogs called Sternol. He went to Woolwich Polytechnic

in the evenings to gain his science qualifications, eventually running his own department researching electrical insulation oils.

In September 1940, George married Helena Theresa Buck, whose father had also fought at Passchendaele. Alfred George Buck was born on 15 November 1885 in Meerut, Bengal, India. His father was in the Royal Horse Artillery in India. He was educated at the Duke of York's Royal Military School and the Royal Hibernian Military School, and enlisted in the Royal Field Artillery at Woolwich on 29 February 1904. He transferred to the Army Reserve on 29 February 1912, reverted on 29 July 1913, and was mobilised in Glasgow on 6 August 1914. Having transferred to the Royal Engineers Signals in April 1916, he was awarded the Military Medal in July 1917 for gallant conduct and devotion to duty at Armentières. We do not have the medal or the citation, but we understand that he was repairing telephone cables in no man's land under fire. I think that the experience outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham must make clear to all of us the fear that he must have felt when he was in the middle of no man's land, a sitting duck, repairing vital communications. He was gassed on 4 November 1917 at Passchendaele, two days before the battle ended, and was discharged on 15 March 1919. He died on 6 July 1952.

The trauma of the first world war was still at the front of people's minds when, only a couple of decades later, this country was again at war. To the relief of his mother May and his new wife Helena, the rebellion that had led to his becoming a scientist placed my grandfather, George Edward Shelbrooke, on the Reserved Occupations list at the beginning of the second world war. He became an air raid warden and a fire watcher during the Blitz in 1940-41. He explained to my father, Derek Edward Shelbrooke—who, I am proud to say, is in the Public Gallery today—how he used to stand on top of the oil tanks at Sternol during a raid and, armed with just a broom, sweep the incendiary bombs down to the men below, who would throw them into the River Thames.

That, I think, is something that we can barely imagine, along with everything else that was happening. The danger, the threats and the loss of life were as great at home as they were at the front, especially during the second world war. George was eventually called up in January 1944, and joined the Irish Guards. After training, he volunteered for the Guards Armoured Division. He was very proud of his service in the Guards. Sadly, in August 1985 he died, too young, at 69.

The impact on families of the great war lasted decades longer than the war itself. My grandfather never knew his father, and the trauma that his mother felt must have been overwhelming when the second world war started and her only son was put in danger as a fire warden, and then eventually called up and sent to war.

The sacrifice that we make our young make is through the failure of politicians like ourselves and it must never be forgotten. I do not agree with much of what the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) said, but I agree with him on this. At heart, every single person in the Chamber is fundamentally pacifist, but we understand that there is a necessity for war at times, that there is a consequence to not taking action and that, if we do not take that action, the loss of life can often be greater.

[Alec Shelbrooke]

We are right to commemorate, at this time, the sacrifice made. We should learn those lessons and how to move on. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) has done an incredible job. I pay tribute to him for his work over the past few years in ensuring that the centenary anniversary is used not just to remember what happened, but to understand what happened and to educate new generations. I think it was my right hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) who made the point that the battle of Passchendaele is as distant to someone today as the battle of Waterloo, but we have to understand why it happened and how we move on.

On 20 September this year, my family will again visit Tyne Cot to see my great-grandfather's name on that wall, to take part in the commemorations of his comrades, all our fellow countrymen and those on the opposing side who died as well, and to remember the sacrifices made in that terrible war.

2.56 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), who gave a poignant account of the canaries and in particular his family history. As someone who also grew up in south-east London, I appreciate many of the stories. I wonder whether this will interest the Minister as well. My grandfather, Oliver Frederick Noyes, enlisted with the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry. He was from Salisbury. The Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry saw service in the third battle of Ypres. It is a sort of pride. There have been so many references already to the people of Wales, to all the people who were affected by the conflict and in particular to Hedd Wyn, to whom I would like to turn.

The county of Meirionnydd was the home of Ellis Humphrey Evans, one of the hundreds of thousands of casualties at the third battle of Ypres, a campaign described by the Prime Minister of the time, David Lloyd George, Earl of Dwyfor, as

“one of the greatest disasters of the war”.

To his superior officers in the 15th Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, 30-year-old Private Evans was most likely just another raw rural recruit, conscripted into the Army because of a surfeit of sons already working on the family farm. Ellis Evans died on 31 July, shot in the stomach—we have heard about the soldiers' prayer; being shot in the stomach is one of the most agonising things that someone could suffer—on the first day in the battle of Pilckem Ridge. He is buried in Artillery Wood cemetery. There is a war memorial in the centre of Trawsfynydd, which commemorates his death and the loss of 32 other men from the community or nearby army camps. This is where the story changes key. Ellis Evans could just be the smudged portrait in a dog-eared photograph, forgotten by the third generation, save for the fact that we do not remember him as Ellis Evans; we remember him as Hedd Wyn—not as Private 61117, but as a chaired poet, prif fardd Eisteddfod Penbedw, eisteddfod y Gadair Ddu, which was held in Birkenhead.

Ellis Evans, whose literary name was Hedd Wyn, grew up in a community where poetry in the strict rules of cynghanedd flourished. Men—it must be said that at

the time they were probably almost exclusively men—from all social backgrounds could win accolade in metrical, alliterative poetry whose unbroken tradition can be traced over a millennium and more.

Sixteen days before his death, Private Evans had posted his entry for the 1917 Eisteddfod of Wales to the adjudicators. He had come second in the previous year's Eisteddfod and he was never to know that this time he would be victorious. The winner of the awdl in the Eisteddfod is awarded a chair. The winner's chair at the 1917 Birkenhead Eisteddfod was draped in a black cloth, Y Gadair Ddu, the black chair, crafted by a Belgian refugee. It became, of course, the symbol of mourning for every Welsh-speaking farmhouse, manse and worker's cottage—the bond of tragedy to unite mothers bringing telegrams to the chapel minister to translate from English into Welsh. Our stories are our common heritage, and what we choose to remember becomes our history. Some stories are more retold than others.

Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri, the Snowdonia National Park Authority, is to be commended on taking the initiative to bring together a national investment worth £4 million, with support also from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Welsh Government. This money has enabled the purchase and renovation of Hedd Wyn's family farm, Yr Ysgwrn. It has just reopened this year as a publicly owned treasure for the nation. Perhaps the Minister might appreciate visiting Yr Ysgwrn; it is an impressive place.

Before this initiative was taken, Hedd Wyn's nephew, Gerald Williams, made sure the door was open to visitors. I remember taking my daughter, Lisa, there 10 years ago. Only the ground floor could visitors see: a kitchen to the left, parlour to the right; the kitchen with hooks in the rafters, a fire always in the range and—this made an impression on me—layer upon layer of wallpaper to keep the place smart, for this house-proud family.

The parlour was the place where people would keep their Eisteddfod chair, and there it was—it was full of Eisteddfod chairs and newspaper cuttings. Visitors could pore over the Gadair Ddu. It was there; we could put our hand on it, brittle with romantic Celtic ornamentation, and repaired—again, we could see this—with dark wax to match the colour of the dark wood.

Although this makes for a romantic story, it was, of course, history at its most vulnerable. There is a pathos in the solitary guardian, Gerald Williams, but it took almost a century for the authorities of Wales to committee—“committee” is a verb in Wales—their way to safeguarding the symbols of Wales's national war poet.

The film “Hedd Wyn” was released in 2005 and became the first Welsh-language film to be nominated for an Oscar. It is to the credit of the director Paul Turner and script writer Alan Uwyd that this film has been shown to generations of school students.

To close, here is Hedd Wyn's englyn to his friend David Owen Evans of Blaenau Ffestiniog, who was killed in the trenches—and we find this on gravestones across Wales and also on the memorial in Trawsfynydd:

“Ei aberth nid a heibio—ei wyneb

Annwyl nid a'n ango’.

Er I'r Almaen ystaenio Ei dwrn dur yn ei waed o.”

There has been some discussion in this debate about pacifist attitudes and celebrating war. It would be beneficial



if we could put energy, time, emotion, imagination and funding into building peace as vigorously as we do into addressing war.

3.3 pm

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): There has been a remarkable series of speeches in this debate so far, not least the one we have just heard from the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts), and I will not usurp the role of the Minister in singling any of them out for special mention, other than to say in respect of the maiden speech we heard that the pride that the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) takes in his town will no doubt incentivise him to be sure that Bedford will be proud of him by the way he conducts himself in this place.

As other more knowledgeable speakers have already explained, a century after the appalling losses on the western front historians still debate whether any alternatives existed. Some blame political intrigue and poor generalship, others emphasise technology, with the battlefield dominated by interlocking fields of fire. This ensured that slowly advancing troops would be mown down by machine guns before making any worthwhile inroads into the enemy's trenches. Minor advances, occasionally achieved, were usually reversed by counter-attacks or simply absorbed into a new, static confrontation a short distance from the original one.

A book called "Forgotten Victory" is a study of the western front battles that rightly draws attention to the 100 days campaign in which the allied coalition won a sequence of decisive victories between mid-July and early November 1918. Its author, Professor Gary Sheffield, regrets the extent to which the British success in those battles at the end of the first world war has been disregarded. For example, he says:

"The burden of fighting the German Army fell mainly to the French and Russians in the first two and a half years of the war, but in 1918 it was the turn of the BEF."

That is, the British Expeditionary Force.

"Between them, the French, Americans and Belgians took 196,700 prisoners and 3,775 guns between 18 July and the end of the war. With a smaller army than the French, Haig's forces captured 188,700 prisoners and 2,840 guns in the same period. This was, by far, the greatest military victory in British history."

So it is absolutely right that, as well as commemorating all the disasters of world war one, one of which we are commemorating today, we will next year recognise the triumph of the battle of Amiens in August 1918. Like others who have spoken in the debate, I pay the warmest tribute to my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) for all the great work he has done on this rolling series of commemorations of the events, failures and successes of the first world war.

Professor Sheffield, whom I mentioned a moment ago, takes his thesis a bit further than I feel able to go. He suggests that the catastrophic offensives prior to 1918 were in some way needed to enable the allied generals to learn the lessons they eventually applied to the successful campaign at the end of the war. I feel, however, that one should not have to waste the lives of legions of soldiers in the relentless repetition of unsuccessful tactics. Time and again, those tactics failed to break the stalemate, or to be exploited when, occasionally, they managed to achieve surprise.

After the catastrophe on the Somme in 1916, there was really no reason to believe that a breakthrough could be made and exploited with the available technology of the day, yet this was attempted not once but twice in 1917. First came the battle of Arras, which was the second of the three huge attritional offensives waged by the British Army in 1916-17. On the first day of the Arras attack—9 April 1917—the British Third Army took 5,600 prisoners, and the Canadians, who captured most of Vimy Ridge, took a further 3,400. This has been called the greatest success of the British Expeditionary Force since the beginning of trench warfare. However, the British advance soon ran out of steam as German reinforcements arrived, and the British Fifth Army had little to show for the heavy losses it sustained. Further major efforts on 23 April and 3 May 1917, partly intended to tie down forces that might otherwise be used against the French, simply added to the butchery on both sides.

In the spring of 1917, Russia was in revolution, albeit not yet a Bolshevik one, while unrestricted submarine warfare and the diplomatic disaster—from the German point of view—of the Zimmerman telegram had goaded the United States into entering the war on 6 April 1917. So did Britain and France really have to squander so many lives so fruitlessly after that date? Why risk the colossal price of failure when the balance of forces at the strategic level was shifting so dramatically? The German leadership fully understood the significance of American belligerency. They therefore gambled everything in the spring of 1918 to exploit the collapse of Russia before the United States could make a real difference. It was therefore folly for the British and French to wear themselves out in 1917 given that the balance of forces would change in their favour once the Americans arrived. Claiming that the Germans could stand the rate of attrition less than the British was no justification at the time, as we have heard already, and it is equally indefensible now.

After the Arras offensives of April and May came the unprecedented use of giant subterranean mines in a successful attempt to break the deadlock. Nineteen mines were exploded under Messines ridge on 7 June with a force that could be felt on the far side of the English channel. Although surprise was achieved, strategic gain was once again lacking. Nevertheless, on the last day of July 1917, the crowning effort of the BEF was made. The third battle of Ypres would endure until 10 November and imprint itself on the British psyche to an extent matched only by the Somme disaster of the previous year. The focus was on the Passchendaele-Staden ridge, and the main thrust was delivered by General Sir Hubert Gough's Fifth Army along a 7.5 mile front. The flanks were defended by the British Second Army on the right and the French First Army on the left.

Having overrun some of the outer German defences on the first day, the British commander-in-chief, Sir Douglas Haig, then discovered that the weather was an even more formidable opponent than the enemy. The official history of the air war quotes Haig's dispatch as follows:

"The low-lying, clayey soil, torn by shells and sodden with rain, turned to a succession of vast muddy pools. The valleys of the choked and overflowing streams were speedily transformed into long stretches of bog, impassable except by a few well-defined tracks, which became marks for the enemy's artillery. To leave these tracks was to risk death by drowning... In these conditions operations of any magnitude became impossible, and the resumption of our offensive was necessarily postponed until a period of fine weather should allow the ground to recover."

[Dr Julian Lewis]

Thus it was that the second phase of the attack, known as the battle of Langemarck and lasting from 16 to 18 August, lacked any element of surprise. The Germans showed no sign of giving way. Next came the battle of the Menin Road ridge, beginning on 20 September and lasting for five days. Its aim was to capture objectives at a distance of between 1,000 yards and one mile, and that was largely achieved. The pattern was then the same in the fourth phase, known as the battle of Polygon Wood, which took place from 26 September to 3 October 1917, with the objective of securing a jumping-off place from which to attack the main Passchendaele ridge.

**Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way; I had hoped to speak in this debate, but unfortunately I have been off site. He mentioned the battle of Polygon Wood, and I was going to mention that my great-grandfather, who had been in France since August 1914, was wounded there on 30 September and won the Military Medal. I wanted to mention that not only because I am very proud, but because it demonstrates how the war was fought by ordinary folk from normal backgrounds, who then went back to their ordinary lives—my great-grandfather was a postman in east Yorkshire. That is what was going on behind much of the conflict.

**Dr Lewis:** I am delighted that my mentioning of that phase of this terrible series of battles gave my hon. Friend the opportunity to pay that well-deserved tribute to his brave ancestor.

**Andrew Percy:** Whose name I wanted to get into *Hansard* but completely forgot to mention—John William Feasey.

**Dr Lewis:** The award of the Military Medal to John William Feasey is now well and truly, and most justifiably, recorded.

The next assault was planned for 4 October, and was persevered with despite a great deterioration in the weather. It was originally hoped that success at Ypres would drive the Germans away from the channel ports, as my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) said, and an amphibious force to help achieve that had already been assembled. The reality, in the words of the official history, was very different.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** My right hon. Friend is rightly describing the sea battle and what was happening at sea, which brought the Americans into the war. Does he agree that, when people ask whether we had to go into the war, the reality is that we could well have been starved out if we had not taken those actions?

**Dr Lewis:** Yes and no. We certainly had to resist German aggression, but that does not mean there was any justification, when faced with a stalemate, to keep repeating tactics and strategies that were wholly unsuccessful and counterproductive. The concept of the “big push” might have had something to recommend it, despite the obvious imbalance between the technology of the machine gun, on the one hand, and the lack of armoured vehicles to override it, on the other, in the earlier phases of the war. That might have justified a big push on the Somme in 1916, but it did not justify repeating the same lethal strategic nonsense a year later.

This is what the official history has to say about what happened after the outbreak of terrible weather:

“The British line had now been advanced along the main ridge for 9,000 yards... The year was already far spent and the prospect of driving the enemy from the Belgian coast had long since disappeared. The continuous delays in the advance as a result of the weather and its effect on the state of the ground, had given the enemy time, after each attack, to bring up reinforcements and to reorganise his defences. Although General Headquarters now recognised that the major objectives of the Flanders operations were impossible of attainment, they were still anxious to continue the operations with a view to the capture of the remainder of the Passchendaele Ridge before winter set in. The weather was entirely unfavourable but there were hopes that it would improve, hopes based on the somewhat slender foundation that the abnormal rainfall of the summer presaged a normal, perhaps even a dry, autumn.”

Instead of remaining a means to an end, the offensive had become an end in itself. At 5.20 am on 9 October, after two days of continuous heavy rain, the attack was renewed on a six-mile front. Sir Douglas Haig had decided that Passchendaele must be captured, so captured it would be. The cycle was repeated on 12 October in the hope of helping to prevent German forces from being switched to meet the impending French offensive on the River Aisne. Some ground was gained east of Poelcappelle and on the southern edge of Houthulst forest on 22 October, with fighter pilots doing everything they could to attack German infantry in trenches and shell holes, on the roads and in villages.

And so it went on and on—a little progress here, a forced withdrawal there, and the final taking of Passchendaele village on 6 November by the Canadians who, with British assistance, extended their gains on the main ridge four days later. According to the official air historian, Passchendaele was

“the most sombre and bloodiest of all the battlefields of the war”.

One of the pilots who lived through it, and later reached the highest rank in the RAF, was Lord Douglas of Kirtleside, who, as Sholto Douglas, commanded 84 Squadron’s SE5 fighters when he returned to the western front in September 1917. He, too, regarded third Ypres as

“the most terrible of all the battles of the Great War”.

He wrote the following:

“The Somme of the year before had been bad enough, and after that it was felt that the lesson of the futility of mass attacks must surely have been learnt. But it was not learnt, and less than a year later our Army was called upon to embark on an offensive that in so many ways was even more terrible than the Somme”.

He continued by saying that Passchendaele

“was the beginning of what was to become for those on the ground a long and indescribable misery... all the drainage systems were smashed in the opening bombardment, and eventually the whole area became clogged with mud. Over this devastated area, which had been reduced to the state of a quagmire, attack after attack was launched... For communication there were only the rough tracks which wound their way almost aimlessly across the mire, and wandering off them led to drowning. The Germans welcomed the rain as ‘our strongest ally’.”

Many of the pilots in the third battles of Ypres were tasked to carry out low-level attacks against enemy concentrations on the ground. As Sholto Douglas later recalled:

“In this job there was very little fighting in the air, and since we were flying at heights of only two or three hundred feet we were supposed to be able to see plenty of what was going on below us. What I saw was nothing short of horrifying. The ground over which our infantry and light artillery were fighting was one vast

sea of churned-up muck and mud, and everywhere, lip to lip, there were shell holes full of water. These low-flying attacks that we had to make, for which most of my young pilots were quite untrained, were a wretched and dangerous business, and also pretty useless. It was very difficult for us to pick out our targets in the morass because everything on the ground, including the troops, was the same colour as that dreadful mud...it was quite obvious to anyone viewing from the air this dreadful battleground...that any chance of a major advance or a break-through was quite out of the question."

We can see from Douglas's memoirs that it was not just fashionable post-war opinion which came to damn the strategy of attritional offensives. The ordering of more and more attacks in such an appalling "morass" was seen at the time, by him and his comrades, as "the grossest of blunders". They recognised the need to relieve pressure on the French by keeping the Germans fully stretched, but he said that

"as I watched from the air what was happening on the ground there were presented to me some terrible questions. Why did we have to press on so blindly day after day and week after week in this one desolate area and under such dreadful conditions? Why was there not some variety in our strategy and tactics? The questions that I asked then are the questions that have continued to be asked ever since; and the answers to them have never ceased to be most painful ones."

As I said at the outset, I remain completely unconvinced by the argument, which some people deploy even to this day, that it was necessary to undergo the catastrophic failures of the Somme and Passchendaele offensives in order to learn the lessons necessary for victory in 1918. There is testimony enough from senior military figures in the second world war, writing of their experiences as junior officers in the first, spelling out the futility of relentlessly sacrificing huge numbers of British troops in fighting unwinnable battles. One does not have to explore every military cul-de-sac over and over again, in order to stumble across a strategy that might actually succeed.

Let us not forget that each one of these tragedies involved an individual personality, and I close with a quote from a young Welshman, Second Lieutenant Glyn Morgan, who wrote this to his father at the start of the Passchendaele offensive:

"You, I know, my dear Dad, will bear the shock as bravely as you have always borne the strain of my being out here; yet I should like, if possible, to help you to carry on"—

this was a letter that would be sent only in the event of his death—

"with as stout a heart as I hope to 'jump the bags'...My one regret is that the opportunity has been denied me to repay you to the best of my ability for the lavish kindness and devotedness which you have always shown me...however, it may be that I have done so in the struggle between Life and Death, between England and Germany, Liberty and Slavery. In any case, I shall have done my duty in my little way..."

Your affectionate son and brother, Glyn".

Glyn Morgan, who joined the Army straight from school, was killed on 1 August 1917. He was recommended for a posthumous Victoria Cross, and he was just 21 when he died.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** To make his maiden speech, I call Paul Sweeney.

3.25 pm

**Mr Paul J. Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak. I also thank right hon. and hon. Members and distinguished strangers in the Gallery for their presence.

I am grateful for this opportunity to deliver my maiden speech and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) who made a remarkable and inspirational maiden speech about his journey from new citizen to Member of this House and we welcome him with genuine hearts.

It is a great privilege to deliver my maiden speech in a debate about such a tumultuous event in our nation's history. I congratulate the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) on his re-election as Chair of the Defence Committee and thank my friend, the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) for his kind introduction earlier today.

It is customary for a new Member to make some reference to his predecessors, and reflecting on the introductory remarks of Richard Buchanan in his 1964 maiden speech, I noted that he declared:

"If it were within my power to introduce a new tradition to this House, it would be that hon. Members who are making their maiden speeches should do so from the Dispatch Box so that they might lay their trembling hands upon it and give some support to their quaking knees."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 1964; Vol. 701, c. 412.]

On rising to speak today, I can thoroughly attest to my sympathy for those sentiments. The only consolation is that I will not have long to wait for relief, as I will have the first opportunity to address this House from the Dispatch Box next week as shadow Under-Secretary of State for Scotland. I can only hope that it will provide more ample support for my trembling limbs.

Dick Buchanan was the embodiment of the finest political traditions of my constituency: he was a proud railway worker, socialist and trade unionist. During his tenure as a councillor on the Glasgow Corporation, it was not unknown for him to turn up at the city chambers from the Cowlares railway works in his boiler suit, before changing into the dapper pinstriped suit of the city treasurer. He also left an eminent legacy to future Members of this House as Chairman of the House of Commons Library Committee during its transition from an old-style, gentleman's-club library to the expert modern research facility that is at the disposal of Members of Parliament today. I am sure that that facility has been particularly appreciated by those new Members preparing their maiden speeches.

The area of Glasgow that I represent has a remarkable and diverse history, and that is reflected in the diversity and vibrancy of the people who live there today. From its early origins at the northern frontier of the Roman Empire, it has subsequently been vital to Glasgow's development, even though it was formally incorporated into the city only in 1891, when Glasgow's territory was doubled in size. The Molendinar Burn, on the banks of which the founder of Glasgow, St. Mungo, established his cathedral and with it the surrounding town, flows from Hogganfield loch, the fresh waters of which also nourished what is the longest established business in the city of Glasgow—Tennent's brewery. The brewery was founded at the Drygate in the 1550s and its amber nectar has slaked the thirst of many a Glaswegian over the centuries.

When I attempt to visualise the evolution of my part of Glasgow, Danny Boyle's epic opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic games immediately springs to mind. What was once an area of sylvan beauty and rural charm, a landscape of farms and weavers' cottages,

[Mr Paul J. Sweeney]

was rapidly swept away as the first harbingers of the industrial age emerged—the first canals and, later, the first railways in Scotland which, traversed the district. By happy coincidence of its position on the approach to central Glasgow from Edinburgh and the Lanarkshire coalfields, Springburn found itself at the epicentre of this frenetic growth as railway manufacturing and associated industries coalesced there to form the largest centre of locomotive manufacture in the British empire. At its peak, it employed 8,000 people and had the capacity to build 600 steam locomotives a year, most of which were for export.

Other engineering innovations were pioneered there, too, most notably the Johnston Dogcart, which, in 1895, was the first motor car to be built in Britain by railway engineer George Johnston in Balgrayhill. The first road trials took place in the dead of night, with Johnston driving the car at a reckless 12 mph on a 20-mile journey around Glasgow. For this apparently reckless behaviour, he was charged with contravening the Locomotive Acts by driving his horseless carriage during prohibited hours along Buchanan Street—then, as now, the main shopping thoroughfare in Glasgow.

Today my constituency retains this fine automotive industry pedigree in the form of Allied Vehicles, the largest manufacturer of specialist taxis and mobility vehicles in the United Kingdom, which employs more than 650 highly skilled people in Possilpark. This high-value manufacturer is also ingrained in the community, supporting many excellent projects such as Possibilities, which supports disabled people in the local area, as well as the highly successful Glasgow Tigers speedway.

As my friend the hon. Member for Glasgow South mentioned earlier, our engineering prowess was also critical to supporting Britain's war effort during the first world war. Springburn's railway works gave themselves over to the production of munitions for the duration of the war. Throughout this period, they were responsible for producing war material such as the first tanks and aircraft. The works also produced the first modern artificial limbs for wounded servicemen.

The directors of the North British Locomotive Company even offered their headquarters building to the Red Cross, as existing hospitals were insufficient to cope with the war wounded. It opened on Christmas eve 1914. Wounded troops would be transported directly from the southern channel ports to the hospital on specially converted ambulance trains. By the end of the war, a total of 8,211 servicemen had been treated.

Nearby Stobhill Hospital, the place where I first entered a more peaceful world some 75 years later, was also requisitioned by the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1914 and more than 1,000 patients were cared for there at any given time until the return of the hospital to civilian use in 1920. As an Army reservist, I have the sacrifice that my city made during the first world war impressed on me every year when I attend the Remembrance Day service in George Square. The stark enormity of the statement on the city's cenotaph, that Glasgow raised over 200,000 troops—a fifth of its population—with 18,000 of that number losing their lives and a further 35,000 injured, never fails to move me with the sheer scale of the carnage that afflicted working people a century ago.

My constituency of Glasgow North East was created at the 2005 general election by the amalgamation of the Glasgow Springburn and Glasgow Maryhill seats. Both areas have previously enjoyed excellent representation from exemplary parliamentarians. Although my seat was once described as a Labour citadel, there were even two Conservative Members in the interwar period, though that was thankfully a brief dalliance. The metaphorically and physically towering legacy of my antecedents was brought into sharp focus when I recently had the opportunity to venture into the Speaker's House and was confronted by a 14-foot-high oil painting of Lord Martin of Springburn and Port Dundas. If there was ever a more effective device to make his successors feel simultaneously inspired and inadequate I have yet to find one.

Michael Martin succeeded Dick Buchanan as the MP for Springburn from 1979 to 2009, which of course culminated in his election as Speaker of the House of Commons from 2000 onwards. His parliamentary career, spanning seven consecutive general elections, was selflessly committed to the service of others and epitomises the opportunity that the Labour movement has offered for the advancement of working-class people over the last century. He rose from being a Springburn sheet metal worker and shop steward to become the Speaker of this House. I was particularly gratified to meet Lord Martin just last week, and he told me of his delight that his seat was now back in "safe hands", as he put it.

My first ever experience of party political campaigning was in the Glasgow North East by-election of 2009, after a telephone call from Gordon Brown's wife Sarah drew me from my exam revision to help William Bain hold the seat for Labour. As someone who was also born and raised in the local area—we were both the first members of our respective families to benefit from a university education—William proved to be a dedicated, industrious and committed champion for our city and its communities during his time in the House, speaking vociferously in opposition to the coalition Government's vicious and self-defeating austerity policies during his tenure as shadow Scotland Office Minister.

Before I had the opportunity to meet my immediate predecessor, Anne McLaughlin, I watched her maiden speech with great interest when she delivered it almost two years ago to the day, in July 2015. I was particularly impressed by her yearning passion for improving the lives of her constituents and restoring civic pride to our communities—a passion that I share deeply. Anne cited the example of the project to restore the historic Springburn winter gardens, the largest glasshouse in Scotland, as a totemic symbol of our mission to continue regenerating a community that is still contending with the challenge of urban dereliction. As one of the founders of the project, I was personally delighted that Anne made such a generous endorsement of our efforts in her maiden speech. I would also like to thank her for the friendly and good-natured election campaign we conducted in June and I look forward to working together in areas of mutual interest in the future.

All the maiden speeches of my predecessors reflect common challenges that have faced our constituents over the years. Though much progress has been made in certain areas, unfortunately many of the issues they identified decades ago remain all too stubbornly apparent today. Michael Martin referred to the urgent need to

strengthen Government intervention in developing new industries to revitalise the local economy and alleviate the unemployment and despair caused by the collapse of locomotive manufacturing. That legacy of decline is something that my constituency has never fully recovered from. I felt that keenly from an early age, as I learned about Springburn's past industrial glories from my grandparents. It is what inspired me to follow my grandfather and father into the Clyde shipbuilding industry, and later to move to Scottish Enterprise, burning with a zeal to rejuvenate the great Clyde-built industries that once gave pride and prosperity to our city.

Having recently been involved with the development of Labour's new industrial strategy for Scotland, I am excited about the opportunity before us to unlock a new era of prosperity with the application of coherent, long-term thinking about the development of more high-value industries in our country, and I look forward to pursuing that vision with vigorous enthusiasm in this place.

Another recurring subject for my predecessors is housing, particularly exploitation by private landlords and the mass clearance of housing in areas such as Springburn. All Glasgow Labour MPs have stood firmly in the tradition of John Wheatley and his famous Housing Act of 1924, which provided state subsidies for house building to build a land fit for heroes. It led directly to the creation of Glasgow's municipal housing system, and saw large-scale building of some 57,000 new homes in new districts such as Riddrie and Carntyne in my constituency between the wars.

Heroines such as Mary Barbour led the struggle against rapacious landlordism during the first world war; she led the women of the city in the 1915 rent strike that ultimately forced this House to legislate to control rents for the duration of the war. I am delighted that my predecessor Maria Fyfe, who represented Glasgow Maryhill for so many years, has successfully campaigned for a statue commemorating Mary Barbour and the Glasgow rent strikers—only the fourth statue of a woman to be erected in the city of Glasgow.

As a result of the efforts of my predecessor Michael and others, Glasgow pioneered the modern housing association movement that saved many of the traditional Victorian tenements in areas such as Dennistoun and Springburn. By writing off the city's £1 billion housing debt, the last Labour Government enabled an unprecedented renewal of its housing stock, led by organisations such as ng homes; more than £100 million has been invested in improving housing standards in my constituency. These physical improvements are about not just the sandstone, glass and slate, but reinvigorating the very soul and character of our city, and what it means and feels like to be a Glaswegian from one generation to the next.

These efforts have, however, been frustrated by Conservative party policies that continue to undermine living standards in my constituency. Despite efforts to regenerate our communities, my constituents are still subject to the indignity of benefit sanctions, tax credit cuts and frozen wages. With unemployment and benefit claimant rates in my constituency double the national average, and child poverty at a disgraceful 36%, the continued onslaught of Tory cuts to living standards is too much to bear for many. When a constituent approaches me in the street to describe how she was forced to

financially support her son and his partner, who was suffering from a terminal brain tumour, for nine months before his death, as he had been found fit to work and had had his benefits cut, it is clear to me that we have seen the creation of a new national minimum definition of dignity, under which anything short of starvation and anything above destitution is now seemingly acceptable—a definition that is apparently blind to any appeal to human compassion. That view was galvanised when I watched those on the Government Benches cheer with perverse triumph as our effort to remove the public sector pay cap was defeated last month, quite oblivious to the harm it causes to millions of people.

My duty as a Labour Member of Parliament has been crystallised by those observations. The people of Glasgow North East sent me here because they despair of the Tories and yearn for the vision of hope and prosperity that Labour has offered them under the inspirational leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn).

In 1948, this House, having witnessed the disastrous effects of two terrible world wars, was told that the welfare state had been established to remove the shame from need and to create a society with solidarity at its foundation. Today it is our solemn responsibility to do everything in our power to defeat this Government and restore that abiding principle in our society. That is why the people of Glasgow North East sent me here, and I will do my utmost to repay their faith in me through how I acquit myself in pursuit of that endeavour in this House.

3.39 pm

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): It falls to me to congratulate my compatriot, the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), on his maiden speech. There can be little doubt that he will bring passion, commitment and conviction to the proceedings of the House. I look forward to many jousts across the Floor of the House over the coming months and, hopefully, years. I was delighted to hear him recognising previous Scottish Conservative occupants of his seat. That was very encouraging; we look forward to further success down the years. I also congratulate him on his new position, which he mentioned. I look forward to seeing him at the Dispatch Box as soon as next week.

I rise with a degree of humility to make a small contribution of my own, and to pay tribute to those who fought and died during Passchendaele, the third battle of Ypres—the biggest British offensive of 1917. I say that I rise with humility because of the calibre of speeches in this debate. I have been informed and deeply moved by the things I have heard. I was particularly moved by the contributions of Members who have spoken in Welsh. Something has been passed to me from my great-grandmother, Mary Ann Owen Blakemore, which thrills at the sound of the Welsh language. Her son and my great-uncle, Harry Blakemore, served in the great war and died in the early months of 1918. He plays an important part in our family history, even though his life was short.

My hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) spoke about the impact that first world war cemeteries and sites have on young people. My wife and I have made it a matter of course to take our children to these sacred places. My hon. Friend described

[Stephen Kerr]

the effect that those places have on young people, and I have witnessed that in my own children. He mentioned the dawning realisation of the sacrifice and slaughter of the great war, and it does make a massive impression on young minds. It reminds them and all of us of the price of our freedom. I have stood and witnessed the last post ceremony at the Menin Gate many times. It is an incredibly moving experience. I wish that every schoolchild in the country could have the privilege of standing there and visiting those sites because of the impact the experience has on our minds.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful point about the education of young people. On a slightly tangential but important point, may I urge him to make contact with the Holocaust Educational Trust, which does massively important work in taking young people to Auschwitz, which shows what unbridled power can lead to?

**Stephen Kerr:** I thank my hon. Friend for that point of information. I will follow up on his invitation.

I was deeply moved by the account of my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), which I hope others who were not in the Chamber will have the opportunity to view and read. It was uplifting, and I thank him very much.

My constituency of Stirling has a long-standing connection with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who fought on the front line at Passchendaele. These things are all well documented, and the many war memorials throughout my constituency are filled with the names of local men who went off to fight, bravely answering their country's call. Behind each of the names engraved on those memorials there is a family left behind and broken-hearted.

It is also important to note in this debate that the men who fought at Passchendaele and throughout the great war were gathered from across the British empire. The cemeteries of the western front are full of gravestones for Australians; New Zealanders, whose worst casualty figures came from Passchendaele; South Africans—Hindus and Muslims alike; Canadians; and Newfoundlanders. Men from all over the imperial territory, from every walk of life, from every race, and from every faith, background and culture came to fight for the mother country in its hour of need. In doing so, they came together in a common cause.

In later years, it has become a fashionable narrative that the men who went to fight for the British empire were victims whose blood was spent wastefully by British officers who had no concern for the men of the colonies. My dear friend Dr Iain Banks, who is a senior lecturer in history at the University of Glasgow and the executive director of the Centre for Battlefield Archaeology, refutes and counters this idea. He calls it

“a false idea, because the men coming from the colonies were not unwilling victims, pressganged conscripts being sent to die. Certainly, the men of the AIF”—

the Australian Imperial Force—

“who had arrived on the Western Front in 1915 were not sacrificial lambs; according to research carried out by the historical unit of the Australian Army, these men were confident and eager for the fight, and they had come to sort out the mess that the old country had made.”

The Scottish memorial in Flanders stands as a permanent reminder of the contribution that Scotland made to the British action at Ypres. This memorial is the only one on the western front dedicated to all Scots and all those of Scottish descent who fought in France and Flanders during the 1914-18 war. Scottish soldiers made a major contribution to the efforts of the British Army during the battle at Passchendaele, and it is worth pointing out that their sacrifice was proportionately greater—one might say, more disproportionate.

Between 31 July and 10 November 1917, all three Scottish divisions were on the western front. They were included in the 9th and 15th Divisions and the 51st Highland Division. These men came from all over Scotland, representing famous Scottish regiments: the Black Watch, the Seaforth Highlanders, the Gordon Highlanders, the Cameron Highlanders, the Royal Scots, the Royal Scots Fusiliers, the King's Own Scottish Borderers, the Cameronians and the Highland Light Infantry. The famous local regiment from my constituency, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, was in the thick of the fighting, with representatives in all three divisions, and it took casualties in every significant phase of the action.

**Bob Stewart:** I thank my very good hon. Friend for giving way. May I just remind the House that a lot of Scottish soldiers in reinforcement units were diverted to English, Welsh and Irish regiments? It is therefore absolutely apposite that there is a Scottish memorial to all Scottish soldiers, whichever regiment they served in. After all, some of us go abroad and command English regiments.

**Stephen Kerr:** I thank my very good hon. Friend for his intervention. It is also a tribute to the fighting qualities of Scottish soldiers that they can be reassigned and deployed as he suggested.

However, there were not only Scots involved. The Canadians, the Newfoundlanders and the New Zealanders, in particular, included a lot of Scottish immigrants and sons of immigrants, who were committed to the battle. The Scottish memorial project reports that of the nine Canadian Victoria Crosses awarded in the last week of October and the first week of November alone, the majority were awarded to Scottish-born immigrants or the sons of Scots immigrants.

Those who came back lived with the legacy of what they experienced. We have heard some very apposite comments about that legacy in this debate. Those who did not return—we will remember them. We must not make the mistake of thinking that these soldiers were passive victims of a war they did not understand or support. That is a view that is often expressed in certain quarters, especially when people say that we have not learned the lessons of past wars. Whether or not they understood the war in the way that we might want them to understand it, they fought because they wanted to do their bit; because they had been conscripted and it was their duty to go; because they were with men who had become their mates and they were not going to let them down. We do our fallen no justice when we strip them of the dignity that comes with the recognition of their agency. They joined up, they answered their nation's call, and they reported to the conscription hall. We can argue about the conduct of the war, but never let us downplay the sacrifice of the men who went to war and laid down their lives.

Whether a person loses their life in the service of their country in a vast battle in a global war such as the one we are talking about, or whether one person loses their life individually, without record or attention paid, such sacrifice is most worthy of remembrance. This is partly the inspiration behind the Unknown Warrior, who rests, anonymously, in the place of highest honour in our nation. While the war memorials, the remembrance services, the cenotaphs, the cemeteries and debates like these are a vital—indeed, essential—reminder of that sacrifice, the true honour and respect we must give to their memory is the kind of country and the kind of world we are building. The approach we take towards one another, and the way we work together as a country, within our borders and across borders, must always honour their sacrifice.

Those who died would no doubt have held a wide variety of opinions and views, as we do. They would have had the same broad diversity of opinion that the population of the country had at that time. Socialists, Liberals and Conservatives all fought and died together. They would have had their differences and disagreements, just as we do, as I said earlier, but demonstrating courtesy and respect to those whose opinions and beliefs differ from our own is one vital aspect of the way we honour the sacrifice of the fallen, as is enlisting ourselves in the pursuit of peace and justice for all, and the advancement of the civil society and democracy that I believe we all believe in. These aims are indeed a fit and proper memorial worthy to the memory of the sacrifice of so many souls.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, may I thank the last two speakers—the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), who made an excellent maiden speech, and the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr)—for what they said about the Highland Light Infantry, because my grandfather served with them and was injured at Passchendaele. I am not able to make a tribute from the Chair, so I thank those hon. Gentlemen for doing it for me.

3.54 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be able to make a short contribution to this important debate and to follow so many interesting, thoughtful and informative speeches. It is a particular pleasure to have listened to two wonderful maiden speeches this afternoon. My hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) talked about making his life in Bradford, having moved here from Kashmir, and I wish my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) well for his Dispatch Box debut next week.

Like many other towns and cities up and down the country, on 30 July my constituency of Heywood and Middleton will commemorate the battle of Passchendaele. We will meet in Heywood memorial gardens as part of the programme of first world war commemorative events. I pay tribute to Rochdale Borough Council for its work and commitment in organising all those events, which are always very well attended by my constituents. They are observed with huge respect for those who gave their lives for our country, those who fought and survived, and all their families and descendants.

I want to give a special mention to Councillor Alan McCarthy, our lead member for the armed forces. I thank him for his work both in that role and as chair of Heywood Township, whose councillors, after consultation with the veterans, decided that commemorations of the centenary of the first world war should be held not in celebration, but rather in solemn reflection and in remembrance of all those who have died and served in our armed forces since the start of the great war.

It is important to remember that almost everyone in the UK has an ancestor directly affected by the first world war, and that nearly 1 million men and women gave their lives in service. My constituent Lynne Coxell, whose second cousin William Robinson died at the age of 18 in the first world war, will be among the many attending the memorial service at Ypres on 31 July, to remember their sacrifice. Lynne has donated William's pocket watch and other artefacts, including his prayer book, to the Passchendaele Museum in his memory.

The Heywood war memorial, where our local commemorations will be held, has its own very special link to the battle of Passchendaele. The war memorial was unveiled in 1925. A statue representing peace stands in front of the cenotaph, with bowed head and bearing a laurel wreath representing victory.

The statue was sculpted by Walter Marsden, an English sculptor born in 1882 in Church, near Accrington in Lancashire, in the constituency of Hyndburn. In 1901 he was an apprentice at the Accrington Brick and Tile Company, whose owners, the McAlpine family, recognised his talent and encouraged him to study at the Accrington Technical School. From there he went on to study at the Manchester Municipal College of Art, and in the 1911 census he gave his occupation as "clay modeller".

Walter Marsden himself saw active service in the first world war as an officer in the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. He fought in the third battle of Ypres, the battle of Passchendaele, for which he was awarded the Military Cross. He was later taken prisoner at Cambrai in France and sent to a prisoner of war camp.

After the war he continued his studies and attended the Royal College of Art. He later worked on many war memorials, many of which are in Lancashire. As well as the memorial in Heywood, there are Walter Marsden war memorials in his hometown of Church, Bolton, Tottington in Bury, and St Annes-on-Sea.

His sculptures reflect his experience of active service. The memorial at St Annes-on-Sea depicts walking wounded returning from the battlefield, blinded by gas. A gaunt, exhausted, helmetless soldier is seated at its base. Walter Marsden said that he had wanted to capture

"the constant nervous rain of trench warfare and the ever-present feeling of danger that was the cause of so much mental agony."

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), because I think he gave us the reality of that with his own experience.

Walter Marsden also depicted a husband going off to war, his wife clutching at him, with a small, sad child looking up helplessly. His memorials tread a delicate line, portraying the human cost of war while paying proper tribute to bravery and sacrifice. The war memorial in Heywood is inscribed:

"To the men of Heywood who gave their lives for us during the Great War 1914–1918".

It commemorates by name the 300 men who died in service.

[Liz McInnes]

I finish by quoting the words on the Walter Marsden war memorial in his home town of Church, Lancashire. That is a fitting point on which to end. The memorial is inscribed:

“Let those who come after see to it that their names be not forgotten”.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** I call Ben Lake to make his maiden speech.

4 pm

**Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC):** Diolch, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for affording me the opportunity to make my maiden speech this afternoon.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and, in particular, the hon. Members for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) and for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin), who both made excellent maiden speeches. Indeed, they set an exacting standard. They spoke from the heart and I have no doubt that they will be a credit to their party, their constituencies and this House.

I welcome the opportunity to remember the third battle of Ypres in the House and to commemorate the first world war. As the years go by, it becomes increasingly important that we remember the conflict and especially the sacrifice of all those who lost their lives. We must ensure that we learn the lessons of the past and strive never again to subject people to such suffering and horror. While visiting one of the many Commonwealth war cemeteries that pepper the Flemish countryside, it was heartbreaking to stumble across seemingly never-ending rows of young lives cut short by the conflict.

As has already been mentioned this afternoon, perhaps the most famous of the casualties from Wales was Ellis Humphrey Evans, or Hedd Wyn, a son of Trawsfynydd, in the neighbouring constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts). Hedd Wyn was a talented poet who, tragically, was killed before learning of his greatest literary triumph. Just a few weeks before winning the most prestigious prize for poetry at the National Eisteddfod, the bardic chair, he was killed at the battle of Passchendaele at the young age of 30.

A manuscript of the winning ode, “Yr Arwr”, or “The Hero”, in Hedd Wyn’s own hand, is one of the many precious treasures housed at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. This sentinel of our nation’s heritage is perched on Penglais hill, overlooking Cardigan bay, a jewel of the Welsh coast, which I now have the privilege of representing as the Member for Ceredigion. I am truly humbled that the people of this great constituency have put their faith in me to speak for them in this place. I am looking forward to working hard on their behalf and serving them well, and I will strive to be worthy of this trust.

My immediate predecessor, Mark Williams, was elected in 2005. He gained the respect of this House and the affection of the constituency, thanks to over 12 years of tireless service. Thousands of people from across the county have benefited from his advice and assistance, and I hope to continue with his good work. I wish him and his family the very best for the future.

Ceredigion is my home. From the peak of Pen Pumlumon Fawr to the tranquillity of the Teifi estuary, its hills and valleys rarely fail to speak to its sons and daughters. It is no surprise that hiraeth should be such a common affliction of Cardis who find themselves absent from the county for too long. As the second most sparsely populated county in Wales, Ceredigion is largely a rural area. Agriculture is the backbone of many of our communities. Farming not only supports a significant proportion of the workforce, but also sustains a range of social activities and events that are the lifeblood of the county.

Ceredigion stretches from the banks of the Dyfi in the north to Cardigan Island in the south. It is bounded in the east by the magnificent hills of the Elenydd, and flanked to the west by spectacular coastline. Indeed, this year blue flags proudly fly above the pristine beaches at Aberporth, Aberystwyth, Borth, Llangrannog, New Quay and Tresaith. Tourism plays a vital economic role in the area, which is unsurprising given that Ceredigion is widely acknowledged to be the most beautiful constituency in Wales.

Ceredigion’s natural beauty is complemented by the diverse nature of her settlements, from the picturesque Georgian harbour town of Aberaeron to the historic mustering point of the drovers at Tregaron, which continues to hold a thriving livestock market to this day.

Although predominantly a rural constituency, we boast two university towns. The university at Aberystwyth was established in 1872, thanks to the pennies of the people—thousands of individual donations from across Wales; and Lampeter is home to the oldest degree-awarding institution in Wales, founded in 1822.

We can also justifiably claim to be the capital of Welsh culture. In addition to housing the National Library of Wales and two universities, Ceredigion has two thriving publishing houses in Talybont and Llandysul, and the recently restored castle in Cardigan played host to the first National Eisteddfod in 1176. The most famous of Welsh bard, Dafydd ap Gwilym, was born in Penrhynoch, and my hometown of Lampeter is the birthplace of Welsh rugby, with the first recorded match being played there in 1866.

That rich mix of rural and urban defines Ceredigion—a tapestry of communities woven tightly by the emphatic landscape and the famous quick-witted humour of the Cardi.

Although we must speak to our strengths, we cannot be blind to the reality that the uncertainty surrounding our departure from the European Union poses a daunting challenge to the very fabric of our community. During my time in this place, I will strive to ensure that the best interests of the rural economy and higher education are at the forefront of the minds of Government Ministers as they conduct Brexit negotiations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we cannot allow ourselves to be forgotten. Decisions taken in London have long overlooked the rural economy, with public investment too often bypassing the hinterland. For too long, amenities considered essential to the urban economy are dismissed as mere luxuries in more rural areas.

Several of my predecessors in this House have pointed to the tragic irony that Ceredigion bestows upon its youth an unrivalled education, but offers them a paucity of job opportunities and affordable housing. For decades,



our county has lost the potential and the vitality of her youth. Around half her young people leave the county by the time they reach 25 years of age.

Many of the young who have left are Welsh speakers, which has meant that in my lifetime—which, I am sure hon. and right hon. Members will agree, is not particularly long—the percentage of people living in Ceredigion that can speak the language has declined from around 60% to just 47%. This steady, silent haemorrhage saps the life of nearly every town and village the length and breadth of the county.

During my time in this place, I look forward to working with those across the political divide to refocus the Government's attention on the challenges facing rural areas, and to encourage greater efforts at developing our economy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are a proud people in Ceredigion, and we possess an historic resolve to buck national trends. We are also of independent spirit—over the years we have seen fit to elect Members to this House from across the political spectrum. I am particularly proud to follow in the footsteps of my distinguished Plaid Cymru predecessors, Simon Thomas and Cynog Dafis. They worked tirelessly for Ceredigion and were passionate about guarding rural areas from the negligence of a remote Government. Twenty-five years after the election of the first Plaid Cymru MP for Ceredigion, I am committed to building on this legacy. It is the greatest of honours to have been entrusted by the people of our county during this critical time. As we come together today to remember the sacrifice of those who gave their lives during the first world war, we can all be inspired by their deep sense of duty. It is that sense of duty and service that I will seek to embrace.

I would like to finish by quoting one of Ceredigion's greatest sons and a founding member of Plaid Cymru, Prosser Rhys. He wrote:

“Deued a ddêl, rhaid imi mwy  
Sefyll neu syrthio gyda hwy.”

Whether I am faced by opportunities or obstacles, the best interests of my county and my constituents will be at the very heart of all my endeavours. Diolch yn fawr.

4.10 pm

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): I commend the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) for an impressive first speech. I thought his mention of Hedd Wyn, who died at Passchendaele aged 30 was particularly appropriate. It reminds us all of what talent was lost, what futures were lost, and what artistic flourishing could have taken place in this country but for that first war.

I was also pleased that the hon. Gentleman acknowledged his predecessor, Mark Williams, saying that he was held in affection throughout the House. He most certainly was. He was one of those Members who have friends across the political spectrum. People would support him just because he was Mark: the political differences dissolved.

I took exception a little to the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that Ceredigion was the finest place in Wales to go on holiday—Porthcawl is obviously a great seaside town—but I hope that his speech inspired those who were listening to think of Wales for their holiday destination this year, because we have so many beautiful places. We must keep a welcome in our hillsides, no matter whether it is in the north or the south.

One thing is certain. There is not a family in the United Kingdom who will not, over the coming months, be remembering the first world war and the family members who were lost, the futures that were lost, as a result of that war. I have a tiny pocket diary that my grandfather took with him to the front. In it, he made a few comments every day about what he saw. I spent a lot of time tracking what he was talking about, and looking at the experiences that he made a note of. He left for war on 13 August 1914, noting:

“We left Limerick by train for Queenstown, embarked on the SS Matheron of steamers Liverpool.”

When he arrived in Belgium, the new idea of moving soldiers to the front quickly was in play. Off he went on a train journey. He spent many hours, indeed days, on that train, which went into sidings as those in charge tried to get all the trains with all the troops to the front as quickly as possible. On 20 August 1914, they finally arrived in a field, where they disembarked. They had nowhere to sleep: they had no tents and no blankets. They lay down in that field, exhausted by the journeys that had taken place from 13 August to 20 August, and slept.

Before they had a chance to sleep, however, they were addressed by Sir John French, who said:

“Our cause is just. We are called upon to fight beside our gallant allies in France and Belgium in no war of arrogance, but to uphold our national honour, independence and freedom.

We have violated no neutrality, nor have we been false to any treaties. We enter upon this conflict with the clearest consciousness that we are fighting for right and honour.

Having then this trust in the righteousness of our cause, pride in the glory of our military traditions, and belief in the efficiency of our army, we go forward together to do or die.”

We are still faced with that dilemma. What do we do as a nation when others violate neutrality and are false to the treaties that have been entered into? Do we then prove false to treaties that we have entered into to come to the support and aid of others? That is the dilemma that the House faces every time we have a debate about whether to go to war. In my time in the House, I have taken part in three debates in which we have had to decide whether to commit our personnel and to take that decision. Each time, it is the issue of neutrality and our treaty commitments that we consider. That is the thing that helps us to make our decision.

My grandfather's diary recounts countless days of heavy shellfire, near escapes from death, exhaustion and countless movements, as he survived the battles of Le Cateau and Mons, and the great retreat from Mons and Marne. He then took part in the first battle of Ypres.

In the first battle of Ypres, the British expeditionary force lost 2,368 officers and 55,787 men. The British regular Army virtually disappeared, leaving only a framework for the new mass armies that were to come. The German army lost 130,000 men, the French 50,000 and the Belgian 32,000. Sometimes when I read the diary, I ask myself—what we have learned and what I need to learn as, hopefully to be again, a member of the Select Committee on Defence. In the Select Committee, we have many times looked at reports about equipment. It is one of the Committee's major priorities.

On 17 October 1914, my grandfather noted:

“Very fine morning, all my chums congratulated me on my birthday. We got a blanket served out to us. We have had nothing to cover us since we came out. Severe fighting is going all along the canal”.

[Mrs Madeleine Moon]

From August to October, they had no blanket—nothing to cover them, despite the battles that they had fought and survived. There was hardly a man of the original expeditionary force who possessed more than the clothing he stood up in and that was often woefully inadequate. It is no wonder the Defence Committee even today is concerned about equipment, logistics, preparation and planning for war.

On 29 October 1914, my grandfather noted:

“Terrific firing all day and night. The Indian troops came here to relieve us, they look a fine lot of men, Gurkha, Sikhs and Punjabis.”

It reminds us that, even then, alliances, coalitions and interoperability were the way in which wars were fought. We rarely stand alone. In that war, 90,000 Indian soldiers and 50,000 labourers served in two infantry and cavalry divisions.

On 1 November 1914, my grandfather noted:

“Damp morning had to clean our saddles and harnesses.”

My grandfather was a signaller and often rode out to ensure that communications between the trenches and senior military command were clear. He continued:

“This was a quiet day in Beuvry but it was the 23rd day of the First battle of Ypres”.

It was also a time of great destruction and horror for the civilian population living in that area. We have talked a great deal about the impact of the war on our personnel, but it was also a time of great horror for civilian populations, who had no idea of where to flee for security. They had no idea where there was safety, and where a bombardment would not lead to death and destruction. Many people were forced out of their homes.

My town of Porthcawl took in many refugees from Belgium, as did many towns across the United Kingdom. This is also a lesson that we still carry with us today—the importance of refuge, and of offering support to refugees and civilians, who, more often than our military personnel, are the ones who are slaughtered during warfare.

One of the things that happened as a result of the first world war was that we recognised that we needed to take responsibility for how we dealt with war, because in the second battle of Ypres the Germans used poison gas for the first time, and created alarm among the stricken British and French colonial defenders. Chlorine gas was a new experiment, and its success surprised the German commanders, but it also led us to look later at developing a law of armed conflict and international humanitarian law, and at what was going to be acceptable and unacceptable. It is horrifying that we still see the use of chlorine gas and mustard gas in Syria, something we thought we had stopped, and that everyone in this House, no matter of which political party, roundly condemns. It is viewed with the horror with which we viewed its first use back in 1915.

We also read with horror the stories of the impact of that relentless pounding on the mental health of the people who fought and the refugees who traipsed back and forth across the countryside trying to find safety:

“I’ll tell you this much, I might not have been wounded in the body but I was wounded in my mind. I don’t know if you can imagine it but obviously, when there is shell fire, you get down to get cover, only an idiot wouldn’t get down, so you get down and you can’t get your nails into the ground and your head under the ground and you can’t get down because you can’t go any further.

You’re on the ground and your nails are dug in the ground and there you are and the shells are bursting around and there’s screaming bits of shells and they’re not just bits of metal, they’re hot metal flying all over the place and there are machine guns going and pandemonium all around. How the devil did you get out of that unscathed? How did you get out? It’s a miracle, if there’s such a thing as a miracle.”

That was written by Sergeant Bill Hay of the 9th Battalion, and I think it is one of the most graphic descriptions of what it must have been like to have been in that hell.

On Sunday 2 May 1915, my grandfather noted:

“Dull day, we rested to-day. Lots of troops went past suffering from poisoning from the gas. A terrific bombardment commenced about 5 o’clock, the noise is terrible...this is the heaviest bombardment I have heard. I had to go to Vlamertinge at 9 o’clock it was black dark and shells were bursting over my head. It was a terrible experience it being my first night out on the line in black darkness. The roads are full of our chaps suffering from gas poisoning.”

The diary ends on Wednesday 14 July 1915:

“Went and laid a line from signal office to 3rd Corps HQ finished dinner time. There was a very heavy bombardment last night in front of the Durham’s trenches between Messines and Ploegsteert. I left Bailleul at 4.38 for England on leave, arrived at Boulogne at 9 pm”.

That is the last we know of my grandfather’s day-to-day experiences. He died at the third battle of Ypres. We know that Driver Albert Edward Ironside, No. 17785, died on 22 July 1917. He is buried in plot 1, row F, grave No. 4 in Dozinghem military cemetery in Belgium. The advance dressing stations in the area were humorously named by the troops: Dozinghem, Mendinghem and Bandaghem. The cemeteries that were created perpetuate those names. We do not know when my grandfather was injured or how he died. We were told that he was poisoned by gas. From 10 July 1917, mustard gas was used every night against British positions. The *Glamorgan Gem* contains an article by Ceri Joseph of the Porthcawl Museum, which has been running amazing exhibitions on the first world war over this whole period to explain the local context, the service that the local people gave and the impact of the war on the town. In the article, Ceri suggests that German tactics had changed in that month. They allowed the British to cover an increasing amount of ground in the hope that they would lose momentum. Forward signal parties would often become involved in fighting, and Albert might have been trapped and died fighting.

What lessons can we learn? What knowledge can one man’s experience give us? Never again should we send people to war without full preparation and without the kit and equipment that they need. We have done that recently. Members of this House did not want to send anyone into Afghanistan with the wrong equipment, but that is what we did. This is something we must always question before we make these decisions. We have also learned that there are few short wars. All wars have long-term consequences. Those who came back from the first world war had to live with their experiences, as did their families and their communities. That war still resonates with us here and with their families, even today.

The accountability of generals has increased. The Defence Select Committee, and this House, demand to know why mistakes have been made and why certain things have happened. We are better at doing that now, and I believe that we play an honourable role here in that regard. All working men, and married women,

achieved the vote after the war. The Government were frightened that those men, returning from the horrors, armed and experienced, would revolt against them if they did not give them the vote. They got the vote but they still had to face the horrors of the great depression. I should like to end on what is, for me, a positive note. In the first election following the conflict, Labour tripled its vote. Five years later, the party formed a Government for the first time.

4.28 pm

**Kevin Brennan:** With the leave of the House, I will reply to the debate on behalf of the Opposition. We have had an excellent debate with some extremely good speeches from both sides of the House. The right hon. Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) made a knowledgeable and thoughtful contribution and enlightened all of us with his expertise. The hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) spoke eloquently, as ever, on behalf of the Scottish National party. We should all thank the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) not only for his speech but for all that he has done to organise the first world war commemorations. He posed the important question: would we pay the price if we knew it in advance? We can never know the answer, for obvious reasons, but we should always consider that point when these decisions are before us in the House of Commons.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), who is not in his place, told us of his father's participation in the battles at Passchendaele. He also rightly reminded the House that, although we say that we must, we often do not learn lessons from such conflicts. He also rightly referred to the famous Wilfred Owen poem "Dulce et Decorum Est". We were all moved by the contribution from the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). As ever, he had the House transfixed with his personal and compelling account of the reality of being in a conflict. We thank him for his service to our country as well as for his contribution today.

We have been fortunate to have some wonderful maiden speeches during the course of the debate. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin), who told us of his personal journey from Kashmir to Bedford. I was pleased that he rightly paid tribute to his predecessor Richard Fuller, whom I know from my university days and who was a fine Member of this House. My hon. Friend is clearly proud of his constituency and his constituents have every right to be proud of him, too, for his contribution today.

The hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), who is also starring later in our proceedings today, told us a moving personal story from his own family and reminded us of the consequences of the aftermath of war, which we should all remember. He also paid tribute to his father, who is watching our proceedings today. The hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) spoke, as I did, about Hedd Wyn, the Welsh poet who was killed at the battle of Passchendaele. We then had a typically knowledgeable contribution from the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the Chairman of the Defence Committee, who gave us a detailed and vivid portrayal of the futility and horror of the battle. He brought great wisdom and knowledge to our proceedings.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) on his excellent maiden speech. When a Member makes a maiden speech, it is customary to say that they have bright future, possibly at the Dispatch Box. It took me six years to get to the Dispatch Box, but my hon. Friend has rather beaten that record since he told us that he will be making his debut just next week. We wish him well in his role, and I am sure that he will do very well indeed. He also mentioned Michael Martin, the previous Speaker. When I was a young new MP in 2002, I had the temerity to ask a question in this House without wearing a tie, and I was rightly admonished by the then Speaker. Times have changed, but I never quite got over that, so I am still wearing my tie despite the new dispensation.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), who is another new Member—so new that I thought it might have been his maiden speech until he took an intervention—told us that he has visited the Menin Gate and witnessed the ceremony. He said that all schoolchildren should perhaps do the same, and I think we would all agree. He also referred to the war memorials in his constituency and reminded us of the contribution of Commonwealth troops in the first world war, including those from India. We should remember that 1.3 million people volunteered for the British Indian Army during that war, with 70,000 of them losing their lives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) mentioned the events being organised in her constituency to commemorate Passchendaele. She also told us the fascinating story of Walter Marsden, who won the Military Cross at the battle and later sculpted the figure of peace on the war memorial in her constituency.

It was a pleasure to hear the fine maiden speech of the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), who paid appropriate tribute to his predecessor Mark Williams, who was genuinely liked by Members across the House. He introduced yet another Welsh word into the debate: hiraeth, which means a deep longing for home. He clearly loves his constituency, which he describes as the most beautiful in Wales. I should remind him that it is in fact the murder capital of Wales because, as those of us who occasionally watch it know, the television series "Hinterland" is made in his constituency. Although he has invited us all to visit, we are a bit nervous because the murder rate seems to be particularly high; almost as high as Oxford in "Inspector Morse." He makes his constituency sound like the garden of Eden—I am not suggesting that original sin was invented there—and hon. Members should take up his offer to visit, as it is a very beautiful place. He has a bright future in this place, so long as he never achieves his ambition of Wales leaving the United Kingdom. In that case he would have to give up his seat, and the House would be the poorer.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), who told us the poignant story of her grandfather's diary from the front and how she uses it as inspiration for the fine work she does on the Defence Committee. We were all moved immensely by what she told us.

It falls to me to pay tribute, as the Minister and I did at the beginning, to all those who gave their life in the first world war, particularly at the battle of Passchendaele, and to those who still give service to us in our armed forces. Today's debate is a hugely appropriate tribute to

[Kevin Brennan]

them. The greatest tribute we can give, as other hon. Members have said, is to do all we can to promote peace. Let us all pledge today to do just that.

4.36 pm

**John Glen:** This has been an excellent debate that I hope puts the House in good standing with those who are watching. We have had 13 Back-Bench contributions and three excellent maiden speeches. I will not repeat the excellent words of the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), who speaks for the Opposition, in going through all of them, but I will mention the three maiden speeches.

First, I pay tribute to the words of the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin). The way he spoke about his predecessor does him great credit. The whole House will be aware of his commitment to Bedford, and we wish him well for his future in the House.

Secondly, I will not say too much to the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) about quaking knees and trembling at the Dispatch Box, but it took me seven years to get here. I am pleased that it will only have taken him a few weeks. I wish him well in his career in the House.

Thirdly, I applaud the young hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) on his composed and measured first contribution. He describes his constituency very fully as the capital of Welsh culture, which, from what I heard in other contributions today, is a contested title. I wish him well in the House, too.

I am grateful for all the contributions and, as I reflect on them, I will refer to my hon. Friends. As we have heard, the battle of Passchendaele, which touched communities across Britain and Ireland, and across the world, was a grim series of events. It is right that we take this opportunity to reflect on the bravery, endurance, service and sacrifice of those involved. We should particularly remember that conditions and casualties were horrific for soldiers on both sides.

In the spirit of the personal reflections that so many colleagues on both sides of the House have shared, I will read a first-hand account of Passchendaele given to me by my constituent Colonel Newbould, a distinguished battle tours veteran. It said:

“While I and others were taking supplies into the line at Ypres, we waded through mud all the way. It was very necessary to keep following the leader strictly in line, for one false step to the right or left sometimes meant plunging into dangerous and deep mud-pools.

One of our men was unfortunate enough to step out of line and fall into one of these mud-holes. Knowing from past experience that quick action was needed if we were to save him from quickly

sinking, we got hold of his arms and tried to pull him out. This did not produce much result and we had to be careful ourselves not to slip in with him. We finally procured a rope and managed to loop it securely under his armpits.

He was now gradually sinking until the mud and water reached almost to his shoulders. We tugged at that rope with the strength of desperation in an effort to save him, but it was useless. He was fast in the mud and beyond human aid.

Reluctantly, the party had to leave him to his fate, and that fate was gradually sinking inch-by-inch and finally dying of suffocation. The poor fellow now knew he was beyond all aid and begged me to shoot him rather than leave him to die a miserable death by suffocation.

I did not want to do this, but thinking of the agonies he would endure if I left him to this horrible death, I decided a quick death would be a merciful ending. I am not afraid to say therefore that I shot this man at his own most urgent request, thus releasing him from a far more agonising end.”

That is the reality of the human misery that we are commemorating today. It is human misery that my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) spoke of with such personal authority when he said that war is disgusting and horrid. But it is important that we as a nation commemorate what happened, and I wish to remind the House that after these events on 30 and 31 July our focus will be on the centenary of the Armistice in November 2018. I urge Members from across the House to consider the resources available to ensure that their local constituencies engage in the commemorative programme.

Many Heritage Lottery Fund projects are taking place up and down the country, in which local communities are exploring and learning about their first world war heritage. Since April 2010, the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded more than £86 million to more than 1,700 projects covering the whole of the UK to mark the centenary. Some 7 million people have engaged in first world war heritage. As the hon. Member for Cardiff West so rightly said, poetry, songs and arts keep us going. Secondary school students continue to join the battlefield tours, with nearly 1,500 schools taking part so far. The Government want to ensure a lasting legacy of first world war remembrance, and education. After all, we owe it to all those who bravely fought 100 years ago on our behalf. So whether attending events in Belgium or the UK, or watching on television, we will remember all those affected by this dreadful battle 100 years ago and ensure that they shall never be forgotten. It is right that this House remembers all those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of their country.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Commemoration of Passchendaele, the Third Battle of Ypres.

## Driving Offences: Private Land

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

4.44 pm

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): On 9 August 2013, a terrible, tragic and preventable accident took place at Swithens farm in my constituency. Eleven-year-old Harry Whitlam died from injuries he sustained after being struck by a reversing farm vehicle. The driver of that vehicle was over twice the legal drink-drive limit, but the Crown Prosecution Service did not bring a prosecution as the accident was deemed to have occurred on private, not public, land.

Harry and his mum, Pamela, live in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns), who is on maternity leave and very much regrets that she cannot be here today. Pamela worked in the café kitchen of the working farm, which, like many other farms, has diversified and become a visitor attraction.

Areas of the farm are designated as both private and public, but, at the time of the accident, the boundaries of those areas were not clearly defined. Indeed, the police investigation was clear about the lack of separation between public and private areas. It said:

“Upon approaching the scene from Swithens Lane, there was no signage or other barrier that would restrict public access to the scene, or inform a person entering from that direction that they are in a non-public area of the farm.”

Harry was a regular visitor to the farm, especially during the school holidays when his mum was working there. He regularly assisted the farmhands with their work, particularly in the petting farm and collecting eggs from the chickens. He was a familiar face and well known to the farm staff. There was another young boy, a friend of Harry’s, who helped out in just the same way.

On the morning of the accident, Harry arrived first thing at the farm with his mum. He was keen to meet up with his friend and also lend a hand with building a new wall to help house some new meerkats. He went off for a short while, returning to the café accompanied by one of his farmhand friends and ordered breakfast from his mum that they planned to collect a little later.

Approximately 15 minutes later, the accident occurred. Harry was in the farmyard when he was hit by a slurry trailer being reversed by a tractor. He was badly crushed by one of the large trailer tyres. The Yorkshire air ambulance flew Harry to Leeds General Infirmary, but, despite the best efforts of medical staff, he tragically died from his injuries.

The investigation revealed that Harry had been walking across the back of the slurry trailer from right to left when he was struck. He had gained access to this working area of the farm by a route that was not in any way cordoned off from the public. Indeed, there are public rights of way across the “private” area. There is no evidence that Harry was running, and evidence presented by PC Martin Ward, a collision investigator, confirmed that the view from the cab “was good” and that

“Harry was there to be seen”.

He concluded that Harry would have been in the sight of the driver for “quite a long time” and that it was “a very low impact speed”.

Owing to the anomaly in the law that this debate seeks to address with “Whitlam’s law”, the driver, Mr Gary Green, despite being over twice the drink-drive limit, was only prosecuted under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. As such, the family had to wait some 17 months before the Health and Safety Executive was able to prosecute him for failing to ensure the safety of persons and other employees, contrary to section 3(2) of the 1974 Act.

This makes it sound as though it was nothing more than a tragic accident. The truth is that Gary Green was drunk, and having drunk such a huge quantity of alcohol, he knowingly and willingly took control of heavy machinery and killed a young boy, when all investigations show that if he had been alert he would have stopped his vehicle as Harry was in plain sight.

As this was only an HSE prosecution, Green was sentenced to just 16 months and two weeks in prison. If he had been prosecuted under section 3 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, causing death by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs, the maximum penalty would have been 14 years’ imprisonment. In addition, there is scope for an unlimited fine, a minimum two-year driving ban and a requirement to pass an extended driving test before the offender can drive legally again. The CPS advise that it is probable that had Green been prosecuted under the Road Traffic Act, he would have received a sentence of about six years.

The disparity in the sentencing for the same offence—driving while under the influence of alcohol—is unjust and at odds with a society that widely condemns such behaviour. The CPS reported that it was unable to bring a prosecution as the accident happened on private land; questions have been asked about whether the CPS was instructed to advise an investigation and whether it considered a manslaughter charge. I have been advised that the police thoroughly investigated the matter and manslaughter charges were considered, but, according to the CPS, the case did not pass the test for gross negligence manslaughter.

What I have called Whitlam’s law seeks to make this analysis irrelevant by calling for parity of esteem. There is much confusion, and contradictory prosecutions around the country. In 2010, David John Arthur, 62, tried to convince Truro magistrates that he was not guilty of drink-driving because he was caught in a Tesco Extra supermarket carpark, claiming it was private property and the law did not apply. He was convicted. In 2012, Lisa Docktray, 41, drove from her friend’s caravan to her own at Presthaven Sands holiday park, Gronant. She had an alcohol reading of 102 micrograms compared with the legal limit of 35, and believed she could drive because it was private land. She was found guilty. But in 2012, a priest, Canon Peter Maguire, was double the drink drive limit when he collided with a vehicle in a carpark. His defence was that the carpark was private land and therefore he could not be prosecuted. He was found not guilty on these grounds.

There are law firms that boast of getting around our laws and getting people off. I struggled over whether to name and shame them in the Chamber, but I fear that would only give them free advertising. They seek blatantly to disobey the law and then look for legal loopholes to get away with it. I think the majority of Members

[Alec Shelbrooke]

would have rightful contempt for these so-called practitioners of law. The road safety charity Brake has said:

“As a road safety charity we know only too well the devastation and suffering caused by drink driving. A drunk driver in charge of a vehicle, of any type, is a lethal combination. Whether this takes place on public or private land ought to be irrelevant”.

The time has come to say that parity of esteem must exist for road traffic prosecutions as it does if someone kills a person in their own home or on the street. Whitlam’s law is about changing the Road Traffic Act so that offences prescribed by it that are committed on private land are classed as criminal offences and are actionable by the police, particularly the offence of driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, regardless of where that vehicle might be. Whitlam’s law will prevent other families from having to go through Pamela’s trauma of losing her only son and then being told that a prosecution for death by drink-driving could not be brought.

You may remember, Madam Deputy Speaker, that a few years ago you were in the Chair when I brought another case to the House—that of a young boy who, a day before his 20th birthday, was killed by a drink driver. How often do people have to come to this Chamber to try to do something about our drink-driving laws and ensure that people are properly prosecuted and that justice is meted out? That would at least bring closure to the family. I ask any parent in this Chamber how they would feel if their only child, their only son, was killed and the immediate reaction was, “We cannot prosecute” even though the driver was drunk and all the investigations showed that he had plenty of time to see the young boy, it was at low-impact speed and the boy was there to be seen?

Harry Whitlam is dead because of a drink-driver, and it shames us all that the driver cannot be prosecuted because of a loophole in the law that some solicitors will exploit to get people off for what is a crime.

I close with a simple but heartbreaking statement from Pamela:

“I believe there should be no distinction between private or public land if someone is found to be in charge of a motor vehicle whilst under the influence.

By driving in this state they not only endanger the lives of others, but also put their own lives at risk.

It is a sad fact that some law firms pride themselves in exploiting this legal loophole, using it to get drivers acquitted of drink driving offences.”

It is even more distressing to me when they quote my son’s death as an example of how they can ‘beat’ the system.”

4.55 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), who secured this Adjournment debate; he will have moved everyone who heard it today. As he knows, I am the father of two young sons, and I respond to the debate not only as a Minister of the Crown, but in that capacity. We have just been debating Passchendaele; how unfortunate that we should come to the Adjournment only to turn to another tragedy. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing the tale of Harry Whitlam to this Chamber. I offer my heartfelt condolences to the Whitlam family.

Regrettably, motor vehicles are responsible for too many deaths on our roads. Although this country has an enviable road safety record, in 2015 there were 1,750 reported road deaths in Great Britain, with many times that figure seriously injured. Motor vehicles were also responsible for a number of deaths away from the highway. In 2016-17, being struck by a moving vehicle was the cause of 31 deaths of workers, according to statistics compiled under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013. This makes it the leading cause of worker fatality.

Harry Whitlam was a child; he was not a worker in a formal sense, of course, but he was entitled to the same attention from those about him that any worker would have expected, or been entitled to. Our traffic law recognises that the highway can be a dangerous place, and it is based on the premise that motor vehicles will be moving at speed in close proximity to each other and other road users. The offences of careless or dangerous driving have been framed in that context, as my hon. Friend says.

Once we look away from the highway, the range of activities using a vehicle that take place on private land multiply in unimaginable profusion. An activity such as motor racing is designed to demonstrate the skills of motor racing drivers and mechanical engineers in ways that would not be appropriate on an open highway. Workers on a construction site may be controlling vehicles in spaces that they know do not have firm foundations or walls. Drivers who are airside at an airport share the ground with aircraft, with all the concomitant dangers that might bring.

All those drivers of course owe a duty of care to those about them, and that duty comes not from being employees or drivers, but quite straightforwardly from being human beings with a responsibility to their fellows. That can never be greater than when one thinks of young people and children. Our responsibility to take care of those around us must surely be exaggerated in our hearts—must be even greater—when we are speaking about vulnerable people: the very young, the very old, the frail, the disabled and the infirm, and so on. I understand my hon. Friend’s frustration that more is not done.

For more than 40 years, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 has provided a framework for ensuring that workplaces are safe. There is a reporting regime that allows the Health and Safety Executive to monitor shortcomings. Of course, not all private land is a workplace. Indeed, places often serve as both workplace and home. Farms are a prime example.

5 pm

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).*

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Rebecca Harris.)*

**Mr Hayes:** Accidents in residential settings are just as tragic as those elsewhere, so when considering whether to formulate dangerous driving legislation for private land, we certainly need to think more widely than the health and safety legislation as it applies to work. Although we should recognise that the highway is a different environment from private land, we should not lose sight of the similarities. In seeking to address the toll of deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents, the World Bank has been advocating that all countries adopt what is known as a safe systems approach to reducing national road casualties.

In December 2015, my predecessor as a Minister in the Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), published the “British Road Safety Statement”, which, among other policies, set out what we are doing in this country to support the safe systems approach. While this obviously related to the highway, the principles can be applied off the highway just as reasonably and effectively.

A safe systems approach recognises that

“We can never entirely eradicate road collisions because there will always be some degree of human error; when collisions do occur the human body is inherently vulnerable to death or injury; and because of this, we should manage our infrastructure, vehicles and speeds to reduce crash energies”

to levels that do not lead to human injury or death.

In considering how to address the tragedy of off-road vehicle accidents, we would do well to adopt a safe systems approach. This is not to say that the solutions will be the same as those applied to the highway, but the aim of saving lives is the same. All this indicates that it is not straightforward to adjust the existing law to improve vehicle operational safety. Yet, the statistics tell us that we should, and must, aspire to do more to prevent future accidents. Legislation is not the only tool. For example, the Health and Safety Executive already works with trade bodies, including the National Farmers Union, to develop good practice relating to handling farm vehicles. This includes off-road specific factors such as working on uneven ground, steep gradients and using on-board machinery. Those things would not be covered by road traffic regulations, even if they were to apply.

I am conscious of how the law may appear, when the penalty for an illegal action depends on where it happens—that does not seem reasonable, does it?—particularly when it seems not to have regard to the equal severity of its effects. So, I am pleased to tell the House and my hon. Friend that I will consider how we might address the matter, including the possibility of future legislative reform. That may sound like a blithe, easy commitment to be delivered by a future Government. However, it is important that we get the reform right, and that we do not rush and make errors in how we frame that kind of legislation. It is more complicated than it first seems for some of the reasons that I have set out, but that is not a

reason to do nothing. To that end, I invite my hon. Friend to come to my Department to meet me and my officials and talk through how we might proceed.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** I am most grateful to hear what my right hon. Friend says, and it will come as a great relief to Pamela and her family that this has been taken so seriously. May I ask whether I could bring Pamela and her solicitor so that they can give their first-hand experience and talk about how this law may be developed?

**Mr Hayes:** I would be honoured and delighted to meet them, so of course the answer is yes.

I have a reputation for quoting poets, and I usually do so in a light-hearted or jocular fashion, as the Speaker mentioned recently. But sometimes poetry can be applied to the most difficult circumstances, and the poet John Donne said this:

“any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind”.

We are all poorer for an untimely loss of the kind my hon. Friend has raised in the House. Of course we are poorer, and of course we hurt when we lose a relative, a friend or a colleague, but we are diminished by any loss, and the tragic loss my hon. Friend described will have moved the hearts, as I said at the outset, of everyone in this Chamber, and of many beyond it who have heard this debate.

I say again that I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the issue of off-road vehicle offences. As I have said in reply to the debate, how we respond will depend on the joint working of a large number of bodies within Government. I am not able today to say exactly how the law will change, but given the short time from the point when this debate was announced, doing otherwise would have indicated that we had not thought this through properly. The implications of any such move will be planned carefully and considered, and we will proceed with certainty as a result of that deliberation. But I tell Members this: we will proceed with the firm intention that tragedies such as Harry Whitlam’s might be prevented in the future.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.7 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

Thursday 13 July 2017

[MR PETER BONE *in the Chair*]

## Housing Supply

1.30 pm

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the supply of homes and affordable homes to buy.

Home ownership has been people's preferred way of living and enjoying their home comforts for many years. All the surveys tell us that an overwhelming majority of UK people are either pleased to own their own home or would like to own their own home, and the reasons for that are obvious. Owning a home makes people free of landlords' special rules and regulations. They are free to do in their own home anything that they wish, subject only to the rules of decency and their conduct towards other people in their home and towards their neighbours. They are also free to amend, decorate and improve the inside of their home in more or less any way they see fit, subject to safety standards, while suitable improvements can be made to the outside, subject to planning consent.

For most people, home ownership has also turned out to be an extremely good investment. Not only does a home represent security for themselves and their family, and a place where they can create and enjoy their own environment; it is a store of growing value. Since 1980, house prices have risen by 7% a year on a fairly steady basis. There have been a few setbacks, most notably during periods of recession. The last severe setback was a 7.6% fall in 2009, on the back of the banking crash. However, that tells us something very interesting: even when shares and the values of banks were crashing dramatically, the average home did not fall in value much against the background of the average steady 7% growth. It is therefore not surprising that 86% of our fellow citizens want to own their own home; it is perhaps more surprising that fewer and fewer currently achieve that goal.

Home ownership reached its peak as people's preferred form of tenure at 71% in 2003. Since then, there has been a sharp decline. Now, only 64% of our fellow citizens own their own home, according to the official figures. I submit that those figures overstate the reality. Because of the way the figures are calculated, if an adult with a job still lives at home with their parents, they do not count as a separate household. They are not in a rented household, so they are invisible in the totals, even though they are, to all intents and purposes, in a rented household under somebody else's rules, although they may not pay any rent to their generous parents.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is making an interesting point. To illustrate it, I asked the Library for the home ownership figure for Ealing Central and Acton. Apparently it is 46%, not 64%. Does he accept that there is a bigger imbalance in London, and that things are worse than the global figures he is quoting? Apparently, the average price a first-time buyer pays in the London Borough of

Ealing is £490,421, on an average salary of £27,000. Does he accept that the inflated house prices in London are part of the problem?

**John Redwood:** I very much agree, and I will go on to look at how we deal with that, at the Government's answer and at what more can be done. The hon. Lady is absolutely right that the figures exaggerate the homeowner percentage. Given the way the figures are calculated, if a group of young adults co-rent and share a property, for example, that does not appear as a series of independent rented households, but as one rented property. The figures therefore understate the number of people living in the rented model compared with those living in the owner-occupied model, because it is measured by housing units rather than individual households. The Government should bear it in mind that we are probably dealing with more people whose aspirations are not being fulfilled, rather than fewer, because the overall 64% figure undoubtedly overstates the reality.

We all know from our own experiences that many under-35s not only cannot afford to own a home, but find it extremely difficult to afford a rented home in London and the south-east because rents are extraordinarily high. They may still live with their parents, but it would not be their preferred way of proceeding; it may not be their parents' preferred answer either, but family loyalty and love come before individual preferences, given the financial positions people find themselves in.

That decline in official home ownership—from 71% to 64%—is more pronounced when looking at the age-related figures. According to the official figures, 54% of under-34s owned their own house or flat in 1996, but that fell to just 34% by 2016. We have gone from a majority of the under-34s being able to afford their own home—so we know it can be done—to a minority of around a third in the more recent figures.

For most people, the financial case for owning is extremely strong. By definition, at the moment it may be cheaper to buy a house and pay a mortgage at very low interest rates than to pay rent, because rents are so high. Looking at it over a lifetime, it is obviously much cheaper and better to make the effort and buy a house, if people can, because they may have only 25 years of paying the mortgage, whereas they may have 50 or 60 years of paying rent, which will cost an awful lot more. Rent is a good way to keep people poor.

**Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): To give the right hon. Gentleman a picture, in my office in Portcullis House, I have Ross, who bought his own home and pays a mortgage of £600 a month, and Dan, who pays £650 a month to rent a room in a flat. For the first it is an investment; for the second it is an impediment to ever owning his own home.

**John Redwood:** That is a very powerful individual illustration that bears out my general point that maybe half of people today would be no worse off month by month if they were able to get a deposit and buy a property, compared with renting. If we look forward 30, 40 or 50 years, they should be massively better off, if for no other reason than that the mortgage stops once it has been repaid, whereas rent carries on.

Worse still is the cruelty of renting for those in old age, when the rent will be at its maximum, because rents are likely to carry on inflating as they have done in



[John Redwood]

recent years. Not only is rent paid for many more years, but people are charged the maximum rent when they are deep into retirement and least able to pay it, and when they will worry about how far their pension will stretch to meet their daily bills. That leaves out of account the possibility that, if someone buys a property, its value will go up, which is an added bonus. As I pointed out, that has been true since 1980. It might not always be true, but if it were true again over 25 years, the owner would be the double winner: they pay less by purchasing rather than renting, and their asset rises in value.

That rise in value gives homeowners more freedoms. If they buy early enough in life, that asset is there, normally rising in value, as possible collateral if they want to raise a loan for some other purpose—to help their family set up a business or whatever it may be—but it is not there for the person in rented accommodation. It is undoubtedly true that a person who manages to buy a property is, rightly or wrongly, usually treated as a better proposition for loans and business activities, which is another injustice for the person continuously paying rent.

I detect some cross-party agreement, which is excellent, that home ownership is the preferred form of tenure for many people—for very good reason—and that we need to make more efforts to get people into it, to deal with their high rental costs.

**Siobhain McDonagh:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the other advantage of owner-occupation is security? In the private rented sector, where an increasing number of families with children are living, a landlord simply needs to secure a possession order for eviction. That has become the main route for the eviction of families, leading to children being insecure and living in temporary accommodation, far away from their homes and schools, with all the consequences that holds for public services.

**John Redwood:** I entirely agree, and I mentioned security for families at the beginning. That is a point well made.

We need to ask what we can do. House prices in many parts of the country, most especially in London and the south-east, are extremely high, and it is very difficult even for someone on average earnings, let alone below-average earnings, to raise a sufficiently large deposit, meet the requirements to raise the loan and meet the interest payments on it. One driver of these very high house prices is undoubtedly the big imbalance between demand and supply in housing. I know the Government accept that and are trying to work on the supply side. If more houses can be produced, all other things being equal, that should help ease the house price pressures.

There is also the question of demand. I think all of us wish to be generous to refugees and to invite in people of talent who can make a good contribution to our community. There is everything to be said for allowing companies investing here to bring in their executives and so forth, but Government Members feel there has to be some control on overall numbers. When we are being generous, as we should be, we have to take into account the strains being put on the housing market, which may mean that the people coming here cannot

get the quality and price of housing that we would regard as important for the lifestyles we wish for all the people in our country.

We need to look at the number of people who need housing vis-à-vis migration, as well as supply. I know the Government are considering that and will be freer on it in due course, once we come to debate in the House of Commons a UK migration policy that meets demands for decency and labour mobility for business, but that also understands the stresses placed on housing and other services if we have very large numbers. Those stresses run the risk of us not being able to offer people the standards we think are appropriate for anyone settled here in our country.

The Government have attempted to tackle the housing problem by driving the construction of more homes and to tackle the issue of affordability by working particularly with first-time buyers on how to get the first deposit and raise sufficient money to buy what are expensive properties. I welcome the Government's initiatives. They are all well-intended, and some have been doing good things. My main purpose today is to raise two questions. Can the initiatives that already exist be beefed up and better advertised, so that we get more people to use them? It is still slower than we would like. Secondly, are there new initiatives we should add to them, given the general imperative to get on with solving the housing scarcity problem in general and the shortage of affordable housing to buy in particular?

Through the help to buy ISA, the Government are offering a £3,000 top-up to someone who can save £12,000 for a deposit on a house. Although £15,000 is a lot of money for someone on a low income who is trying to save, it is not a lot of money for a house deposit. I wonder whether, through the Minister, the Chancellor might think a little more about those figures. The more help that can be offered, the faster someone can get a deposit and the better that is for their ability to access the housing market.

The Help to Buy equity loan scheme is admirable, but it is limited to new homes only, and I wonder why. Most people buy a second-hand home. By definition, the stock of those homes is massively bigger than the new supply in any given year. I know it would be a lot more expensive if we opened up the scheme to a wider range of houses, but it would also be a lot more useful, because many people buy a second-hand home as their first home. Indeed, for some, the pleasure of buying a first home is in buying a second-hand home that is not in great shape, so that they can put their stamp on it. It may be a way to have a more affordable home, because they may wish to spend their own time and effort on improving the house, rather than spending money to get others in to improve it for them. It might be worth looking at whether we can provide more of a bridge for people who want to buy second-hand homes.

The affordable housing fund was set up to generate more construction of affordable housing. Again, that is a great initiative. I would like the Minister to give us more up-to-date information on how many homes that scheme might achieve and what the approved build rate under it is. One issue with the affordable housing fund is the cost of building the properties and the quality of their construction. I am all in favour of really good-quality construction, and modern homes are built to a much higher standard in many ways than older homes. However,

one way to match the need for higher quality and affordable cost may well be to build on the initiatives of the house building industry, by having more construction in the factory before things are brought to site. None of us wish to recreate the old prefabs. They were a necessary and welcome development in the immediate post-war crisis, when so much of our cities had been devastated by bombing, but they are not the kind of thing we want to build today. People want elegant, well-insulated homes that meet all modern standards.

**Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman talks about prefabs and the old style. In my constituency the Peabody housing trust developed as a millennium product pre-built buildings on Murray Grove. People are still living there now, and very happily so. There is a modern way of developing that could be cheaper. Does he think the Government should consider that?

**John Redwood:** I agree. There is not a public-private sector divide, in my view; it is something the private sector is beginning to adopt and needs to look at just as much as the public sector. If done well, it can improve the quality. Indeed, some of the most expensive properties that individuals can buy are modular German or Swedish houses, which are imported in kit form and put up in a week or two on a suitable piece of concrete, on a nice plot of land, at quite a high price, with extremely elegant finishes.

The reason we can both drive quality up and drive cost down is that in the factory environment we can engineer and produce the larger parts of the house to high specifications and low tolerances, so that they are very accurate. When the houses are then on site, they are in good order and we do not need all the site labour. We do not have problems when it rains, because it is all being done in a controlled environment, where dust and dirt can be controlled and there are not the wrong wet or dry conditions. We can have perfect conditions for manufacturing to a high quality. The more we can achieve in the factory, and the less we have to do on site, the more we speed up the build time. Months can be taken out of the build time, and if we take out time, we take out cost.

I hope that more can be done. Persimmon, for example, is producing very high-quality homes for private sector buyers. Its Space4 factory does quite a lot of prefabrication work for a number of homes in its range. I hope there will be more initiatives. I mention that to the Government because, through their affordable housing fund, they have the money and they are the customer, as well as the final customer for the property. They can therefore use that intelligently, as a buyer, to drive the process in the way I have suggested, so that we get quality up and cost down—a double benefit.

The Government have a rent to buy scheme. I would like to hear more about that and whether it can be made more generous. The idea is lower rent when someone takes on the tenancy, to give them more scope to save for a deposit. They then have the right to move in and switch from renting to buying. That is an excellent idea.

I think that the Government could do more on their own estate and on brownfields in general. That is partly a planning issue and partly an investment or encouragement

issue. By Government, I mean local as well as national, because the two need to work in partnership, which often requires national Government to lead the way. A large number of properties, particularly in our towns and cities, are in use but are in decline, or the buildings may be empty because their use has terminated. Given the pace of change in retail, there will be redundant retail space, and given the pace of change in office employment and some industrial employment, there will be redundant older buildings. Older warehouses and industrial plants have been elegantly converted into homes, for example in docklands. When those buildings are down on their luck or become free, we must ensure that the public sector does all it can to make permits and proposals available so that people can transform them.

Perhaps the Government could look at a scheme to back individuals who want to transform a property of their own—a sort of modern homesteading scheme for which they can be given support if they want to take on a poor property—or if a group of people want to take on a larger property and convert it. We could have more action to deal with dereliction, which is often close to valuable real estate in some of our leading cities, but we need to back that with an initiative. It should not always be large companies that eventually get around to doing that and taking all the property; there may be an opportunity for individuals, smaller businesses, co-operative arrangements or whatever to take on property problems and turn them into opportunities.

On brownfield sites and in urban redevelopment there is generally scope for central and local government to have a bigger vision—some are good at that, but some are rather slow—and to use it to identify suitable sites for more affordable housing for sale.

**Dr Huq:** There is another level in London—the Mayor of London. The right hon. Gentleman was asking for more up-to-date statistics. A press release today from the Mayor announced 50,000 new affordable homes, 1,823 of them in Ealing, with two thirds for first-time buyers and one third at social rent levels. I am curious to hear from the Minister whether the Government will also commit to social rents. On the whole, does the right hon. Gentleman welcome that breakdown, which might go towards counteracting the feeling of many young people that the housing ladder is being kicked away from them?

**John Redwood:** As I have said, I am pleased with any initiative that provides more affordable housing for sale. London is the centre of the crisis, because it has the most unaffordable housing for most people, but it has considerable scope for the sort of developments that I have been talking about, where there are brownfield areas or property that needs change of use or that can be extended or improved where suitable schemes could work.

I cannot sit down without mentioning my constituency, which has its own housing issues. I live in part of the country where quite a lot of people would like to buy a home. My council, Wokingham Borough Council—my constituency also includes parts of West Berkshire Council—feels that it has done more than its fair share by identifying large sites for new house building and our building rate in the constituency is almost 1,000 homes a year, which is a very fast pace of change to accept.

[John Redwood]

The council wants two things to make that a bit more tolerable. First, it wants reassurance from planning Ministers that the housing will be in places only where the council is making provision. It is making plenty of provision, but there is a temptation for inspectors to grant permission for houses not where the council is planning, so not with the road, school and health facilities that we would like.

Secondly, as the Minister will recognise, given the phenomenal pace of change, the council needs financial help to put in the infrastructure. It is no good getting the private sector to finance a lot of new homes if there is no extra primary school, doctors' surgery or, above all, more road space, because our roads are now totally congested. The local council had to put in three new primary schools in a hurry a couple of years ago when the numbers had built up and changed rather rapidly because the new people coming in to buy the new homes had rather more family members than had been anticipated when the first forecast was run. There is a real issue with maintaining a decent quality of service and finding the money for it.

When a council or area is co-operating, the Government, in turn, should co-operate with it and local people and provide infrastructure and some sort of order and pace to the development, because otherwise the pace of change becomes disruptive and difficult and turns people against the idea of more housing, which nationally we clearly need. There need to be fair shares.

I obviously welcome the Government's initiatives to promote more prosperity and development in the north, because that suits us as well. We have been carrying a lot of the brunt of development and growth. Growth and jobs are welcome in many ways, but they must be at a sensible pace. We on our side of the argument would like to see fairer shares across the country, just as much as many Members representing seats further away from London would like a bigger share of the growth that the country is capable of.

Perhaps a more contentious note is the right to buy. I am an enthusiast for the right to buy because it is a good way for people to acquire their own home, but I wonder whether the access arrangements are sufficient. Why do we limit access under the right to buy to post-1997 houses in some cases? Are the discounts large enough? I do not buy the argument that selling a socially provided house reduces the supply. The number of houses remains exactly the same after the transaction with the same people living in them as before it took place; it is just that the form of tenure of the one that is sold changes and there are all sorts of restrictions on resale to ensure that they are still properly used and the system is not exploited.

Under the system we are now developing, which I welcome, if a publicly owned house is sold and someone takes out a private sector mortgage, the state gets a receipt. I want that money spent on producing another house, so that right to buy can become an ally of more housing provision because the money can be recycled. That is what developers do: they undertake a development with their capital and then sell it on because they need the capital to do the same again and to build more houses. The state should be more agile at doing that. It should be recycling the capital, thereby fulfilling more people's wish to be homeowners by allowing them to transfer from renting to purchasing.

My final comment about the state sector—it is not specifically within the Minister's remit, but is part of the general housing problem—is on the provision of service housing. I have always favoured the idea that we should try to replicate the opportunity to buy within the confines of service life. I think that the way to do that is by having a home base concept in all the services, so that a soldier, sailor or airman knows what his or her home base is and has quarters or property there.

There should be an option: either they buy private sector property nearby, perhaps with help from the Government and their services employer, or, if they are in the military estate, there should be a proxy arrangement whereby they could take a mortgage on their quarters, flat or house. They would have the financial interest in it, but they would have to sell back to the state when they ceased to be in the military and would do so with the benefit of any rise in house prices by some suitable index or local arbitration. While they were in the services they would be collecting the money for a deposit and participating in the housing market, which they otherwise would be debarred from by virtue of their service tenure and need to rent service property. That could help. I do not like to see people coming out of the services after 20 years with no deposit and having rented service property all their life, and then local authorities say, "Well, you're not our responsibility because you haven't lived in our area long enough or at all," so they find it difficult to find housing. We need to do better by our service personnel.

Those are some thoughts for the Minister on how to improve and beef up the initiatives to get more people enjoying the benefits of home ownership. We seem to agree that the benefits are generally there. If we in politics can bring a bit more joy into people's lives and give more of them the things they would most like, it would be a worthwhile day's work. I offer those thoughts to the Minister in that spirit.

1.59 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone, in a debate that is important for my constituency. I welcome the Minister to his place and trust that we can have a constructive relationship in working around the housing crisis in the city of York.

After 60 years without a local plan, the Tory and Lib Dem parties in coalition on City of York Council have proved that political expediency is far more important to them than addressing the needs of my community. That has an impact not only on the housing crisis and people desperately needing a home they can afford to live in, but on our public services and the local economy, because local businesses are also feeling the heat.

On Monday, the council's local plan working group approved a plan, after a further two years of delay, to focus on high-density, luxury developments in Labour areas of the city and to minimise development in the Tory and Lib Dem areas. That strategy will fail to deliver the minimum number of affordable units needed in York, as the coalition has taken the absolute minimalist approach to development and will not even meet its quota for affordable homes. The local plan does not build on the evidence presented by independent experts to build the right number of homes and the mix of

housing desperately needed in York, and it will not meet York's requirements for social housing, which is now at such a premium.

Owing to issues in the local economy, the city is not working; the local economy is struggling. Public services—I can name the healthcare sector and the NHS—are struggling to recruit the staff needed to support the city, because people simply cannot afford to live in York. York has many brownfield sites to develop. They are not ready for immediate development, because they need to go through a decontamination process, which we all understand takes time. However, housing on those sites and, in particular, the York Central site, with which I am sure the Minister is familiar, will be completely unaffordable for local people, because the City of York councillors have determined that the homes will be luxury apartments, which our city does not need. People who are already struggling to find and afford a home they can call their own will be unable to access that housing.

In fact, people on low incomes in York now have to find 8.9 times their salary for the cheapest properties in the city. That is out of their reach, so they are either leaving the city altogether, creating the crisis that we are seeing in many sectors, or having to rent privately. In York, 26% of housing is now in the private rented sector. The cost of renting a two-bedroom property is £838, and renting a three-bedroom property costs more than £1,000. The average cost of a house to buy is more than £300,000. The Minister can already see that York is becoming inaccessible for local people. The average wage in York is just over £22,000—it is a low-wage city because of the decline in its industrial base. There is an economic challenge as well as a housing challenge, which means that our city is altogether challenged. That is why I appeal to the Minister to look at how we can put solutions in place.

**Dr Hug:** I wonder whether my hon. Friend has had a similar experience to me. The cost of private rent is punitive, and buying is even worse. I do a lot of school assemblies, and every school I go to says that it has recruitment problems because people cannot afford to stay in west London. The schools can get good trainee teachers in their 20s, but the minute those people want to put down roots, they are off to Milton Keynes, Slough or wherever the nearest affordable place is, which creates an uneven age structure in the teaching staff and messes everything up.

**Rachael Maskell:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In teaching and right across our public services, it is a real challenge for public servants to be able to live in these premium spots to provide the vital services for the next generation. That is the position particularly in our schools, but also across our health and care services and other vital services.

In York, there is a real shortage of the housing required. In 2015-16 alone, York suffered a 52% fall in affordable units delivered. The need is getting greater and access is getting further away. Over the past five years, house prices have increased by 27.6%. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) is right to highlight the real issues with access to housing, but for my constituents it is only a dream.

In the council's debate on Monday, the Tory and Lib Dem councillors did not mention social housing once, yet 1,600 people are on the waiting list. I have met many

of them, and they are living in very cramped conditions. Just last week a constituent told me that they were sleeping on the settee and their child on the floor in their parents' house because they cannot access housing of their own. They are being moved from their accommodation and have nowhere to go, but the council cannot provide any housing for them. There will be a challenge in meeting people's needs, particularly the educational needs of their children, as a result of the housing situation. Whether we are talking about damp accommodation, which I come across, overcrowded accommodation or the rising number of homeless people in York, we must address the need for a supply of social housing and not just what is called affordable, because for people in York a quarter of a million pounds is totally unaffordable.

We will see this problem increase. Universal credit is being introduced this week, which will have an impact. There is also a real challenge with the amount of housing allowance that people get, because for the broad rental market area the calculation is based on an area broader than just York itself, so the amount of financial support that some families can get comes in under the rate they should get.

Bizarrely, the site of Imphal barracks was included in the local plan. Under this Government, Imphal barracks is due to close in 2031. There is a 15-year window for the local plan, so the window will close well before 2031 and that site should not be in the plan, because no housing will be put on it before the end of the local plan era. But the council saw that as a way of boosting the numbers—it is a false way. Those homes cannot be counted, so our housing crisis will be even greater.

The so-called local plan will be a total disaster for our city, but it is also an absolute scandal. I am talking about its focus on all these high-value, luxury apartments, which our city does not want or need. Where they have been developed in our city, they are used as assets. People do not live in those homes but just purchase them as an investment, or they are used just for holidays and race days or weekends. We hear about the story in London, but that practice is becoming more and more prevalent in York. That will not address the needs and the crisis that people are having to face in their own housing situation in York.

I would say that we are seeing an experiment in social cleansing—if not social cleansing itself—in what is happening in the development of York. This is the wrong kind of housing, in the wrong place, and it does not address local needs. We need social housing and truly affordable housing to meet the needs of our community, but it is at a level far lower than that which the Government have set. The local plan is the worst example of political manipulation at the cost of ordinary people I can think of, and the Government should not even allow it to hit their desk.

In the light of recent events, which have shown the needs of the poorest in our society being totally ignored by the elite, it is time for the Housing Minister to decide which side he is on. I have raised these issues with his predecessors on many occasions, but we have not been able to make any advance. That is why I trust that this Minister will be able to offer some hope to people in my constituency.

The people who live in my community need homes. That is basic. They are not looking for more; just homes where they can live and raise their families. I trust that

[*Rachael Maskell*]

these appalling proposals will be rejected, and that the needs of my constituents, our public services and my local economy will be met through a proper proposal for the housing that York needs.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair):** Order. Before we continue, it might be helpful to Members to know that I am required to start the winding-up speeches at about 2.30, and that three Members are seeking to speak.

2.10 pm

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I congratulate the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) on his helpful presentation on affordable homes, which included some good ideas about how the Minister can address the issue.

As a father with three sons and two granddaughters, I well remember having a full house while my son and daughter-in-law lived with me. That is the way it was, because that is what they needed to ensure they could be on the site and then move. I declare an interest as a landowner; I have had a couple of sites passed that I have then given to my children to help them. Not every child has that opportunity. I remember when they lived with us, with their baby, while they built their house. There was a period when they accumulated money to finance themselves, get a deposit and move on. They did not fall into a category eligible for social housing, which would have enabled them to pay less for rental accommodation. Things in Northern Ireland are very different; the matter is devolved, as the Minister will know. My son Ian and his partner Ashley also lived with us before they got their first home so that they could accumulate some cash for their deposit.

I understand that time is of the essence, Mr Bone, and I will speak about a couple of points. Young people need their own space and their own lives. Sadly, social housing is so strained that many young people who work are unable to get a foot in and are therefore stuck either paying someone else's mortgage by renting—as the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) mentioned—or living with parents for longer than they would like.

Couples who both worked while they had young children used to be an oddity; now, the family in which one parent can stay at home and look after the children is fast becoming the oddity. That is due not to extravagant lifestyles but to the cost of getting on the housing ladder and of running houses that were bought when prices were high. In my constituency, and perhaps across all our constituencies, there are homeowners who now have negative equity, and it will be a long time before they get out of it, if ever.

Getting on the property ladder can be difficult for a young family. That is where the Government must step up and step in to assist first-time buyers. One of my staff members here in London is buying a house at £575,000. How on earth can they do it? Only with the good will of family connections is it possible to get on the first level of housing in this city. The sister of a girl who used to work for me lives in London. They are both

accountants and probably fairly well paid, but the house that they are buying is £700,000. Where do people in London start if they want to buy a house?

The total housing stock in England increased by around 190,000 dwellings last year, as I am sure the Minister will mention. That is 12% higher than the previous year's figure, but well below the 250,000 that the Government said would be built. I heard someone in my constituency ask recently how we planned to fill all the homes that we are building in Newtownards—1,000 new homes on a 100-acre site on the east of the town. Lagan Homes will build some 550 houses on two sites in Bangor, and another major developer, Turkington, is developing a site at the foot of Scrabo in the middle of Newtownards.

House prices have increased slightly over the years, but there is an undersupply of affordable private rented accommodation, as every one of us here can attest. An increasing number of applicants on the social housing waiting list are in housing stress, all of whom pose particular challenges and must be dealt with using the framework for councils provided by the community planning process.

My council area, Ards and North Down, has a population of 158,000 and is still growing. Almost 19% of the population is aged 15 or younger, 61.6% are 16 to 64 and 19.5% are 65 and over. The issue is not just houses but whether accommodation is suitable to the age of the people living there, including pensioners and those with disabilities. New build starts in my council area increased by 66% between 2012 and 2014, but they fell again in 2015. The urgent housing wait list—people who need houses right now—is 1,300 people long, which indicates the scale of the problem.

No one has yet talked about co-ownership. My son and his partner have a house today because of co-ownership. That is what got them on the ladder; they had to start somewhere. We have not heard either about the option of living above shops. There are lots of shops in many cities and towns across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland with options for upstairs developments of flats, and we should consider that.

I am mindful of the time, Mr Bone. Major investment is needed in all constituencies across the United Kingdom. It will help local construction industries, and therefore the local economy, and allow families an adequate standard of living. It must be driven by Government initiatives. With great respect to the Minister, who I know will have a good response, as will the Opposition spokesperson, we should subsidise developers providing smaller pensioner homes, and help first-time buyers to get on the property ladder without increasing their long-term debt to an unmanageable level.

This debate is about not simply allowing houses to be built, but Government help, encouragement and involvement at every level, from social housing to affordable private housing. There must be a team within the Department to focus on the end goal of merging the two sectors to deliver for all the families in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. They are crying out for fit-for-purpose affordable homes, and we have a duty to deliver them.

**Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair):** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his self-restraint.

2.16 pm

**Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): The figures are these: home ownership among under-25s has dropped by 50%, and home ownership among 25 to 34-year-olds has dropped from 58% in 1997 to 37%. The multiplier between income and property price was 3.5 in 1997; today, it is 8.5. That is the reality.

In my very brief time, I will share the story of my constituent Jonathan, who is doing well in HR. He earns £38,000, which is £10,000 more than the London average. He thought that he could benefit from a London and Quadrant Housing Trust shared ownership scheme, only to find that a one-bedroom flat in Morris Court in my constituency would cost £500,000. That scheme is supported by the Government. Affordable by whom? Not Jonathan on £38,000 a year.

We need big thoughts, not little thoughts. We do not need to tinker; we need to think about the impact of buy to let on our economy, and particularly on our housing market. London is the only capital city in the world that does not restrict international investment in its residential property market. How can a young first-time buyer ever fight their way through?

We need a crusade in the public sector for councils and public sector bodies to make it a priority to use their land for low-cost home ownership and social rented accommodation. As long as they can sell it to the highest bidder, they will do so to subsidise their other services. I am not saying that they are wrong; I am saying that that is a consequence of what is going on.

The person I would like to pray in aid is not a natural ally; it is Paul Smith, CEO of Haart estate agents. He said in *City A.M.* yesterday that

“as the average loan size increases whilst the average income decreases”,

despite first-time buyers’ desire to buy, young people are being forced

“beyond their means, and government should intervene with a tax break as a quick and straightforward way to help them get onto the ladder... Theresa May’s legacy on home ownership has so far been a disaster. The ‘just about managing’ are further away from owning their own home than they ever have been, and the government’s feeble housing white paper did not go anywhere near enough to get housebuilders building and the market moving.”

I could not have put it better myself.

2.19 pm

**Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate all Members for their measured tone in this debate, which is so important to our constituents. I declare an interest as a London homeowner and as a private landlord.

We need to see this debate in the context of the overall shortage of homes, particularly in my city and my borough, where home ownership is a desire for many but a pipe dream for nearly everybody. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) and others highlighted, the multiplier effect is now so high that even people on a very good income in London cannot afford to buy a property; I was interested to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) that the situation is the same in York.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) made a point about recycling and right-to-buy receipts. The situation is very difficult in areas such as Hackney. We have a shortage of land to recycle, and land is expensive. Since the ’80s, we have lost 10,000 homes to right to buy, yet the waiting list for social housing now stands at 12,100—the highest figure in 12 years. Up to 500 new people are applying to be added to that waiting list every month; if I have time, I will give some of their stories.

In my borough, more people rent privately than own their own homes—not because they do not want to own their own homes, but because they have no option. However, given rent levels in the private rented sector, it is amazing that they can afford to do so. A typical two-bedroom property costs £420 a week, while a four-bedroom property costs £683 a week. Those were the median values of London rents in January this year, according to data from the Valuation Office Agency. People are squandering money on private rented accommodation, unable even to think about putting aside a deposit, even if on their income they could afford to get on the housing ladder.

We need to examine the fact that so many people now need social housing because they cannot get on the ladder. The knock-on effect of this cost shunting is immense. Hidden homelessness is growing massively in my constituency: in many households, one family live in the bedroom while another live in the living room. Does the Minister have access to any figures on that?

This is one of the new big scandals. When I started out as a young councillor, I used to visit families in bed and breakfasts. There was then a cross-party consensus, driven by the Labour Government, to get rid of the practice of putting people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We are now seeing a huge cost in homelessness. My local newspaper, the *Hackney Gazette*, which comes under the umbrella of Archant, has done a good investigation on how much is being spent on homeless families. Hackney Council alone—just one London borough council—spent £35 million last calendar year to house homeless families in temporary accommodation, where they spend three to four years on average.

I used to say to people, “If you qualify as in need of housing, you might be in a hostel for six months, but hang in there and you’ll get something,” but increasingly they are now there for not just a year, but 18 months. I have known mothers come out of hospital with their newborn baby and go into a single room in a hostel with their other half and their toddler, alongside many other people with different vulnerabilities. That is not acceptable, as I am sure the Minister agrees. We want practical answers from him about how the Government will tackle the problem.

This comes down to the supply of housing. It is important that we build that supply to ensure that there are homes in the right places, as the right hon. Member for Wokingham said. Average prices in Hackney have risen by 85% over the last five years. The average price for a semi-detached property is now £920,000, while the average price for a flat is more than £500,000. Another important aspect of the problem is that many people are trapped in flats because they cannot afford to borrow the additional money they need to move into a house. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and

[Meg Hillier]

Acton (Dr Huq) said, that is how we lose key public sector workers: they may need an extra bedroom or want a different lifestyle, and they do not really have the option in Hackney.

Earlier this year, the Public Accounts Committee produced a report called “Housing: State of the Nation”, which was driven by our concern about the Government’s programme to release enough public land to build 100,000 homes over the last Parliament. That programme has improved thanks to the Committee’s scrutiny, but I warn the Minister that our report is part one of a series—not too long a series, I hope, if he listens to our concerns and takes on board our serious points. The report highlights the human costs of the homelessness problem: 120,000 children in England are living in temporary accommodation today. That is not only a cost to the public sector, but a human cost for those concerned and their communities. The consequences to individuals and to the taxpayer are immense. Having families moving around, changing schools and health providers, adds cost and stress to the system.

More affordable housing for ownership is vital, but so is ensuring that affordable housing for rent really is affordable. Even for working people, it can be very difficult to afford a council rent in Hackney, particularly if they are on minimum wage or are not working full time. Housing benefit is taking the strain, along with the private sector. Some £21 billion a year is spent on housing benefit. As a new Minister in his Department, I am sure the Minister is aware of that figure. I hope that over the summer recess, when Parliament is not there to subject him to detailed scrutiny—don’t worry, we’ll be back—he will take the time to think about how that £21 billion could be better recycled and spent to serve those in need of social rented housing, as well as those who want to buy.

Let me touch on some potential solutions for the Minister. Community land trusts are a really good opportunity to maintain the value of land for the benefit of the community in perpetuity. Public land is often sold off to the highest bidder, because that is how Departments balance their books, but if the Minister can get a double dividend, surely that is worth pursuing: decent homes for people that are affordable to buy or rent and that bring money into the public sector.

Planning clearly needs to be revisited, and so does shared ownership, because so many people are trapped in it. In fact, there was a shared ownership property for sale in my constituency for more than £1 million. When I pressed the housing association on it, it said, “It’s okay: four sharers on incomes of £70,000 each could buy it.” That is ludicrous. It is not what the whole model should be about.

We need to look at new models of ownership. Speaking as a Labour and Co-operative MP, I think we should be looking at co-operative ownership. That would require some legal changes, but I do not think that the House would resist such changes if they were proposed by the Minister. I am aware that the Government are worried about losing votes, but I think there would be strong cross-party consensus on this issue.

Finally, we need to raise the borrowing cap for councils, so that they can be more innovative in how they provide housing. My borough is doing a good job. It has

3,000 homes for building in the pipeline, of which 1,500 are for council housing at affordable rent, but the other half are for sale at high prices to subsidise the rest. Would it not be better to give the council the capacity to put that housing out there at a lower price?

I ask the Minister for answers on some specific points. Will he update us on the progress of the voluntary right to buy for housing association homes and particularly on the impact on councils, such as Hackney, with high-value council homes, which, under the original proposals, were expected to backfill the discount for those housing association sales? We are anxious to know what is happening, because we do not want to lose more of our affordable homes in an area of such high housing need. Will he also update us on the release of public land for new homes, which the Public Accounts Committee has scrutinised in detail? Will he give us the assessment of double households—hidden households—that I asked for? Have the Government really got a grip on that? I do not blame the Minister if not, because he is new to his brief, but it is vital that he gets a grip of it, because it gives an idea of the latent demand as well as the social cost.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden highlighted overseas absentee purchasers. Will the Minister consider holding serious discussions with the Treasury about taxing those overseas purchasers for buying properties that sit empty next door to the very hidden households that I represent? It is a complete injustice that in a city as rich as London, people are living in massively overcrowded conditions, unable to get on the housing ladder and unable to move from their small flat to a bigger home, while just down the road whole blocks are sold off overseas over a weekend and are never lived in.

2.28 pm

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship in this important debate, Mr Bone. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) for securing it. A range of interesting and informative points have been made. From the contributions we have heard, there can be little doubt that housing is important for people and communities throughout the nations of the UK.

I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that aspirations are not being fulfilled. Everyone deserves a decent and affordable home to live in. Unfortunately, many people are being priced out of the communities they grew up in, either because of rising house prices and rents or, in some areas, simply because of the lack of available properties.

My own area is no exception, although the challenges we face are very different from those of London and the south-east. When we compare average house prices with the average salary in my local area, we find that house prices in the Falkirk area are around five times higher than salaries, and around six times higher in the West Lothian area. House prices continue to rise faster than local incomes, making a house a good investment for someone if they can afford it, but not everyone can.

There is more to housing availability than the supply of deliverable housing land. For many local residents price is not a factor, as they are simply unable to obtain a mortgage to buy a property in any case. We need a full mix of housing tenures for our communities to be

vibrant, which means market-value properties for purchase, affordable homes for purchase, and homes for rent, which are also essential to the mix. Affordable homes are essential in preventing homelessness, improving family wellbeing and tackling inequality. For example, last year in West Lothian there were 1,360 homeless presentations and there are 9,409 people on the council housing waiting list, which is a clear indication that local demand exceeds supply.

Undoubtedly, a range of contributory factors have led to the shortage of available homes. For example, we have an ageing population, and in my constituency it is anticipated that we will have a 130% increase in the over-75 population within the next 25 years. When that is coupled with the growth in single occupancy for younger people, it puts massive pressure on the number of available homes. However, I am in little doubt that the roots of the housing crisis stem from the Housing Act 1980, which resulted in sales that wiped out large swathes of housing stock across the UK. In this respect, I very much differ with the right hon. Member for Wokingham. Ensuring that the receipts from the sale of housing stock were either used to offset debt or reclaimed by the Treasury made it virtually impossible for councils to replace their housing stock. If councils had been able to do that, we might be in a very different position today.

Of course, housing and planning policies affecting Scotland are devolved. Under the Scottish National party Government, Scotland has scrapped the right to buy, and in doing so we have helped to preserve housing stock, protecting up to 15,000 social homes from being sold over the next decade. Government investment in housing, in partnership with councils, housing associations and developers, will generate economic activity in the region of £1.7 billion per year, on average, supporting around 14,000 jobs in construction and related industries across Scotland.

Between 2011-12 and 2015-16, the Scottish Government exceeded their target of building 30,000 affordable homes by more than 10%, with 33,490 affordable homes being built, including 22,523 for social rent, 3,473 for other affordable rents and 7,494 for affordable home ownership, all of which creates an important mix. The Scottish Government's affordable housing supply programme has a target to deliver 50,000 affordable homes by 2021. In addition, the Scottish Government are undertaking a wide-ranging review of the planning system in Scotland to improve its effectiveness.

I will highlight some of the Scottish Government's achievements. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has highlighted that the Scottish Government spend 85% more per head on social housing than England and Wales do. Also, the latest figures on housing completion rates show that across all sectors in Scotland we are achieving 73 completions per 100,000 of the population, which compares very favourably with 47 in England, 39 in Wales and 56 in Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, the provision of affordable housing is fundamental to tackling inequality and ensuring sustainable communities, and it is important for the maintenance of social mobility. While the situation in Scotland is not perfect, the SNP understands that providing more affordable housing and more social housing must be a priority. I hope that UK Ministers find some examples of good practice in the positive work that has taken place in Scotland over the past 10 years.

2.33 pm

**Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I am told that I ought to declare an interest for the record: as the outgoing Mayor of Greater Manchester, I had responsibility for strategic planning and strategic housing.

I strongly welcome this debate and the opportunity to contribute to it. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) might be either glad or dismayed to know that I probably have a considerable measure of agreement with him in both the way he set out his case and the specific points he made. However, there was perhaps one sin of omission and one of commission.

I will deal with the omission first. I will quote Pete Redfern, the chief executive of Taylor Wimpey, who made a strong point in a review that he carried out last year, in which he said that

“it is vital that policy focuses...on all tenures”,

because the impact of the rented sector on the home ownership sector and vice versa is still very powerful, and we must not neglect that. We must also recognise—in fairness, the Minister's predecessor had begun to take it on board—that there are some people for whom it will almost certainly never be possible to join the home ownership queues, and we must ensure that there is an adequate provision of high-quality affordable social housing.

I will pick up at an early stage the point that the right hon. Gentleman made about ensuring that our councils have adequate control, because one of the realities at the moment is that far too often developers win on planning appeal; he is right in that regard. However, such wins are massively against the interests of the rational planning of our communities, particularly in areas of dramatic growth of the kind he described in his own constituency. We must ensure that our local authorities have the capacity not only to determine where new homes are located, but to ensure that with that new housing comes the infrastructure to create liveable communities rather than just housing units. That is a very important point.

We have heard some powerful comments from my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), my hon. Friends the Members for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) and for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), and the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) about the reality of housing on the ground. We have a housing crisis in this country. It may not affect everybody—it does not affect me as an individual homeowner—but for members of my own family and certainly for many of my constituents there is obviously a crisis.

There is a homelessness crisis and a crisis for those who are inadequately homed—the “disguised” homeless—as several hon. Members have recognised. We are not seeing a high number of new homes built; we now have a crisis of building. One of the most dramatic features has been the major decline since 2010 in the number of people under 40 who are homeowners, because nearly a million people in that age group have disappeared from home ownership. I recognise that it is a moving age group, but that decline is still significant, showing that things are not as they ought to be.

The Government have to take some responsibility for this situation, including for a White Paper that, frankly, is not fit for purpose. I think that anybody who examines



[Tony Lloyd]

housing over any period recognises that short-term fixes simply cannot and will not work. We really need some consensus on both house building and house supply over about a 25-year or 30-year period. We ought to look with ambition at building 250,000 new homes ever year, which is the kind of figure that over time can make a material difference to supply. If we do not do that, the crisis that exists in London, and increasingly in cities such as York, will become the norm throughout our country. We must have an ambitious and radical move on house building.

**Jim Shannon:** It is important that we underline the type of accommodation that is needed in the future. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise—I think the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) referred to this—that those who are getting older need specific accommodation? In many places there does not seem to be much provision for that specific accommodation. Does he feel that it needs to be a central part of the Government's strategy as our population grows older?

**Tony Lloyd:** The hon. Gentleman brings me on to an important point. One thing that we must begin to recognise is that we do not actually have a housing market; we have many different segments of housing, all of which have different features. Of course we must recognise the needs of vulnerable people and older people—older people are not necessarily vulnerable, but they have different housing needs. Those needs must be recognised in a long-term housing strategy, and we must ensure that provision is across the piece.

I have the current figures on new starts. In their 2015 manifesto, the Government committed to building some 200,000 starter homes over the Parliament, which is 40,000 a year. Quite frankly, the figures are so dismal and so insignificant that we are failing not simply to hit the statistical targets, but failing real families and real people.

**Meg Hillier:** I hesitate to repeat myself, but, as my hon. Friend just said, the Government are building 40,000 starter homes, and I remind Members that the waiting list for housing in Hackney is 12,000. That is just one London borough. That demonstrates the stark gap between demand and supply.

**Tony Lloyd:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have got to have a radical shift in how we deliver things.

In the few moments I have at my disposal, I want to talk about some of the things we have to do. I applaud a number of comments made by Members from all parts of the Chamber. London is probably a special case, but there certainly has to be an examination of the capacity for people to move speculatively into the London housing market. They might not simply be overseas investors; in some areas it might be about recognising that institutional investors, or even private investors, have a detrimental impact on the capacity to house our population. A real issue has been raised about London in particular and the position of people on low pay in public services. We want them to work in our inner-city schools, but frankly they cannot afford to pay the rents or mortgages considered to be the norm.

When we still have the concept that a £450,000 property is affordable, we are living in the realms of fantasy. The traditional lending ratio that building societies offer is 4.5:1. By definition, that means that someone needs a family income of £100,000 for that affordable property. Most of us would not regard that as being the income of the people we want to target affordable housing towards.

**Jim Shannon:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Tony Lloyd:** If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not; the debate is short and I know that the Minister will want some time to respond.

We have to look at the question of land availability in a determined way. Some of that is about the cost of land. One issue we all face is that if land is valued at the post-development price, the landowner is the institution or person who creams off all the excess profit, even though the work is not put in by the owner, but possibly by the developer or the commonweal. We have to find some way of transferring the capacity for that value added into provision for the commonweal, whether through the public sector or more generally. We also have to look at the fact that in many of our cities—London, Manchester and northern cities generally—a lot of our brownfield sites are in need of enormous investment to bring them up to a level that is fit for building. Remediation is not just a fancy word; it is something that has to be invested in to make land usable.

We need to recognise that we have a massive skills shortage. There may be an ambition to increase housing supply, but we have a crisis looming with the ageing workforce in construction. The Minister needs to work with other Departments to ensure that there is some rational planning for the future. Frankly, it is not obvious that there is any sense of rationality or planning. If the two could be joined together, we may be in with a chance. We urgently need to tackle that skills shortage. If we do not and we have any kind of housing boom, we will once again see the development of the cowboy builder or prices going through the roof.

If we are to provide starter homes, we must ensure that they are starter homes in perpetuity. The discount needs to stay with the property, because otherwise we will never be able to guarantee, in our overheated housing market, that people will continue to be able to get on the housing ladder as first-time buyers. We need to ensure that Help to Buy for first-time buyers is realistic. Some of the suggestions that the right hon. Member for Wokingham put forward are well worth considering. We have to have something that allows first-time buyers to get into the property market. As Members have said, often the problem is not the cost of funding the mortgage—the mortgage is sometimes considerably cheaper than the rental alternative—but the deposit. The accumulation of the deposit is virtually impossible for many people, and we need to do something about that.

Where I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman is on the concept of right to buy. We have to look at one-to-one replacement. We have to ensure a consistent supply of housing in the social sector or under council ownership. There is nothing immoral about different types of tenure. We need to be tenure-blind in how we plan our future, but if we are tenure-blind, we have to ensure that the resources are there for that tenure.

The last point I will make, simply because of time, is this: I appeal to the Minister to look carefully at the role of social landlords. Social landlords in my city region told me that if they are given the opportunity to develop tenure-blind, they can increase the supply of new homes that they put on the market. The significant increase that they could provide would make a material difference. The artificial restrictions on social landlords are simply not helpful.

I once again congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing an important debate. We have to continue the debate, because we are scratching at the surface. We have a long way to go if we are to move to that sense of having a long-term vision for housing. Without that long-term vision, we will fail this generation and we will continue to fail future generations. This is an important debate, but it must continue.

2.46 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Alok Sharma):** It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time in this Parliament, Mr Bone. May I start by declaring an interest, in that my wife is the owner of a property that is rented out? I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) on securing this debate. I agree with other Members that we are debating an incredibly important subject. As ever, he made an incredibly thoughtful and intelligent speech, which has been the hallmark of his contributions since he entered this House in 1987. I would like to take some credit for helping him win that first election, because I was his bag carrier at the time.

I think the housing White Paper is a rather good piece of work. I was not involved in it, but it makes clear that there is no silver bullet, while acknowledging that for decades we have not built enough houses in the United Kingdom. I agree that every credible analysis says that we need to build between 225,000 and 275,000 homes a year to keep up with demand. There is a reason the White Paper is titled, "Fixing our broken housing market". I hope colleagues will acknowledge that it is not just a question of individual Governments; successive Governments have tried but not succeeded in getting the house building market going. We have seen some progress: in 2015-16, some 190,000 homes were delivered, but I fully acknowledge that there is a lot more to do.

Whether housing is for sale or for rent, it is increasingly unaffordable, as we have heard from Members today. To give some statistics, to buy an average home in England costs almost eight times average earnings. Twenty years ago, it was three and a half times average earnings. I agree with my right hon. Friend that in this country people value owning their own home. A very large percentage of people want to do that. I also agree with the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) that there is an element of social mobility to home ownership. The Conservative party commitment in our manifesto is absolutely clear: we want to deliver a million homes by the end of 2020 and half a million more by the end of 2022. We need to do better, and that means tackling the failures at every point in the system. I know that Members have talked about those failures, and I will try to address them in my speech.

As one or two colleagues have noted, I am new to this brief. I have heard many of the suggestions that have been made, and I will take an opportunity over the summer to think carefully about much of what has been said, but the start has to be building more houses. In October, we launched the home building fund, which will provide £1 billion of short-term loan funding for small builders, custom builders and innovators to help diversify the house building market. The fund is versatile. It provides £2 billion of long-term loan funding for infrastructure, which we all agree is incredibly important. Many communities are happy to take more homes, but want the infrastructure to go with them. Although it is too early to see homes completed through the fund, I am confident that, over time, it will unlock up to 200,000 homes, with an emphasis on brownfield developments. I would encourage Members to spread the word to businesses in their areas that may benefit from that fund.

We are supporting communities by ensuring that they can get involved in local planning through neighbourhood planning. I do not know whether the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) has had an opportunity to talk with her local communities about neighbourhood planning in the context of the local plan, which she expressed some concerns about.

As we have seen with neighbourhood plans that have been adopted and made, local communities are willing to take more housing. In fact, in the areas where plans have been adopted, an average of 10% more housing has been accepted than was the case under the plans of the local authority. What people do worry about is infrastructure, so we have introduced a £2.3 billion housing infrastructure fund to make sure that infrastructure is put in first, which is vital. The prospectus was launched on 4 July and I would again encourage hon. Members to bring the fund to the attention of their local councils. If every local council put forward high-quality proposals, I believe we could make a real difference. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham mentioned, we are talking about more roads, healthcare facilities and schools. Getting local people to accept housing means giving them more infrastructure.

On public sector land, we are taking direct action to release public sector land for development. Since 2011, we have released land or identified land to be released with the capacity for almost a quarter of a million homes. That is incredibly important and I want to get to grips with it in my brief. The accelerated construction programme will ensure that those homes are built quickly on surplus public sector land. The programme will also encourage new entrants to the market to deliver more homes overall.

We also need councils to plan for the homes that people want to live in, where they actually want to live. As we set out in the White Paper, we intend to consult on a new standardised approach to provide a transparent and consistent basis for the preparation of local plans, which is more realistic about the current and future housing pressures in each place and is consistent with the modern industrial strategy that we have set out.

Many colleagues talked about support for home ownership. I want to make it clear that the Government are absolutely committed to supporting home ownership and we are taking action to help first-time buyers. We have helped more than 400,000 households buy property through schemes such as Help to Buy and right to buy,

[Alok Sharma]

and 80% of those we have helped through Help to Buy have been first-time buyers. The number of first-time buyers is at a nine-year high. I agree that we need to be doing much better, but it is at a high. My right hon. Friend asked why the Help to Buy scheme applies only to new homes; the reason is that that helps to drive up supply.

Our shared ownership offers an important route in to full home ownership, by allowing purchasers to buy a minimum 25% share in a new-build home. We have also raised the income cap on shared ownership in England.

**Siobhain McDonagh:** What would the Minister say to my constituent, Jonathan, who earns £37,000 a year but cannot be part of a shared ownership scheme built by London and Quadrant Housing Trust, because the cheapest one-bedroom flat is half a million pounds? My constituency is one of the cheapest in London!

**Alok Sharma:** As I have acknowledged, we need to be building more homes—there is no doubt about that. I am happy to discuss with the hon. Lady that particular case. I am not here making excuses; I acknowledge the tone of this debate, which is that we need to be building more houses.

**Tony Lloyd:** Will the Minister reflect on the question of incentives to new home ownership? Restricting the scheme to new properties does a number of things. First, it restricts the supply. Secondly, it breaches the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) put forward about people wanting to stay in their communities. On top of that, older properties are often cheaper. The policy does not make a lot of sense.

**Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair):** I remind the Minister that it is normal for the proposer to have a chance to reply.

**Alok Sharma:** I have noted the points that have been made and I am sure we will have individual discussions with colleagues.

Another issue noted was the rate of build-out and developers not building out on the planning permissions granted. As colleagues will know, we made proposals in the housing White Paper to ensure planning permissions are acted on much faster. I want to work with developers to help them, but they also need to help us to get homes built.

We had a discussion about social housing and affordable housing. Housing associations are responsible for about a third of all new housing supply every year. We are supporting them to build more affordable homes through our £7.1 billion affordable homes fund.

In the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, it is more important than ever to reflect on our approach to existing social housing. That is why we are focusing on supporting housing associations and local authorities with their plans to regenerate existing housing estates. The estate regeneration national strategy and funding package was launched in December 2016 and more than 100 estates are already receiving funding.

It is clear that there is an enormous amount to do. Successive Governments have failed to provide the homes that we need. Although there has been some progress, it has not been good enough. I am determined to work with every organisation, business and colleague who has a role to play, to ensure that we build many more good-quality homes, which our country needs, to help more people achieve their dream of home ownership.

2.56 pm

**John Redwood:** I thank the Minister for his reply, as well as all colleagues who have contributed to a wide-ranging and informative debate. As we have been reminded, some prices of flats and houses, particularly in London, are now excessively high for anyone on any kind of normal income. That is a reminder to those thinking of buying their first properties that the best reasons are that they like the place, can afford to live in it on the financial terms available and like the freedoms that home ownership produces, because what we have seen in the last 40 years of great price growth, where people make a lot of money, might not be repeated given the very high levels that some properties have reached. The main purpose of a home is somewhere for the family to live, not as an increasing store of value, although that has been an advantage for those generations who have bought in recent decades.

I urge the Minister to get into discussion with the Ministry of Defence. I mentioned in my opening remarks a particular problem with the provision of accommodation for people leaving the services, who are not well served by the arrangements for service quarters. There are things that could be done—some using public money and public assets, and some that could be done by the private sector harnessing private money to the housing needs—that would provide a much better answer and not leave people in danger of being homeless when they leave our service. It is quite wrong that some people are placed in that position and councils are unable to help them.

I also urge the Minister to be in regular contact, as I am sure he is, with the Treasury. As previous Housing Ministers have discovered, the Treasury is crucial in the housing equation. High interest rates, which made difficulties with mortgages, used to be the curse of Housing Ministers, but that is not his problem. Perhaps in a way we have had the reverse; with all the quantitative easing, asset prices, including property, have risen rather more than they otherwise would have done. But there are a lot of tax issues. I was pleased that the last Budget did something about stamp duty, but it is still very high for people buying their first home in the more extended markets. Anything that can be done to cut the costs that the Government impose on buying a home and owning it will be extremely welcome.

I hope the Minister will look again at how wide-ranging some schemes are. I think we can make a good case to say that the Help to Buy loan should be extended from new homes to second-hand homes. Surely we are interested in the prospects of every individual trying to buy a home. It is not primarily a scheme to increase the number of houses being built—there are many other ways of doing that—but is primarily to involve more people in the housing market. It seems very odd to

ration that scheme only to people who are near a new development that would suit them when that might be only 1% of the properties on offer.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## Organ Donation: Opt-out System

[Ms KAREN BUCK *in the Chair*]

3 pm

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of the introduction of an opt-out system for organ donation in England.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Buck. I want to begin by sharing with the House my reasons for tabling my debate and by telling the stories of Max Johnson and Joe Dale. Yesterday, I had the privilege of meeting Emma and Harry Johnson—Max Johnson's mother and brother. Max is nine years old and has cardiomyopathy—a condition that enlarges the heart and can be life-threatening if left untreated. Max is kept alive by a tiny metal pump in his chest, and has been waiting for a heart transplant for six months. He is one of 6,388 people in the UK waiting for an organ donation. Last year, 457 people died while still waiting.

Joe Dale was a constituent of mine. He died last month after a sudden asthma attack, which caused devastating brain damage. He was just 16 years old. After his death, his family made the selfless decision to donate some of his organs so others might have the chance to live. Because of their decision, Joe became one of the hundreds of deceased donors who save and improve lives every year in the UK. I know that right hon. and hon. Members will want to take the opportunity to join with me in passing our condolences to Joe's family and giving our thanks for their brave determination to help others in spite of their personal tragedy.

The stories of Joe and Max, the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) and the very important *Daily Mirror* campaign have re-energised my long-held belief that as a country, as politicians and as a legislature we can do more to help those in need of organ transplants.

**Mr Geoffrey Robinson** (Coventry North West) (Lab): I will be very brief. My hon. Friend mentioned the *Daily Mirror* campaign and the private Member's Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) and other supporters, which failed due to the prorogation of Parliament and the general election. Luckily, I have position No. 6 in the ballot, and I want to inform my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis)—I compliment him most sincerely on conducting today's debate—that I intend to reintroduce the Bill pretty much as it stands. I will be presenting it next Wednesday in the House of Commons, and I hope I can count on my hon. Friends' support. That also applies to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

**Dan Jarvis:** I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the *Daily Mirror*, which ran a very important campaign for some time, and thanking it for the work it has done. I also thank him for confirming, I think for the first time, that he intends to use his private Member's Bill as an opportunity to introduce a legislative mechanism for the Government to change the law in England, should they wish to use it. I hope that will provide a forum where this matter can be further debated constructively in Parliament. I am very grateful to him for taking that

[Dan Jarvis]

decision, and I look forward to supporting his Bill and working with him and, I hope, the Government to make it a great success.

Four hundred and fifty seven unnecessary deaths a year is too many, and I believe it is our duty to reduce that number and save the lives of people such as Max. By changing the law to an opt-out rather than an opt-in system we in Parliament can do that.

The truth is that there is a common misconception about how organ donation works. Only a very small number of people die in a way that allows for organ donation. The vast majority of people on the organ donor register will never actually donate their organs. The figures are startling: about half a million people die every year in the UK, yet last year, out of that half a million, only 5,681 people died in circumstances that made donation possible—about 1%. Although there are hundreds of thousands of people across the country who are registered as potential donors, only a handful will ever be in a situation that allows donation to take place. The reality is that there are simply not enough registered organ donors. People in the UK—specifically in England—are dying as a result.

Accompanying those alarming facts are some more positive recent statistics, as reported in this week's "Organ Donation and Transplantation Activity Report for 2016-17". Last year, there was a 4% increase in the number of deceased donors to 1,413—the highest number ever in the UK. Coupled with more than 1,000 living donors, that has resulted in 4,753 life-transforming transplants this year—a 3% rise from last year. The number of patients whose lives were saved or improved by an organ transplant has increased by 3% to 4,753. All that means that more than 50,000 people are alive today thanks to a transplant.

The "Organ Donation and Transplantation Activity Report" is a good news story, but I believe we can make it an even better news story. Behind every statistic there are people, and, as Lorna Mason and Gary Masterson wrote this week in the annual transplant activity report:

"Every transplant is the result of a complex collaboration between donors and their families, a host of clinicians working in different parts of the NHS and finally in transplant recipients and their family."

They went on to say that

"opportunities for donation continue to be missed...While we cannot quantify every missed opportunity precisely, we need to work collaboratively to make sure that these are as few as possible."

Despite the excellent campaign run by the NHS to encourage organ donation—details of which can be found at [www.organdonation.nhs.uk](http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk)—the UK still has one of the lowest rates of consent in Europe for organ donation.

The "Taking Organ Transplantation to 2020" strategy, published in 2013, set the target of increasing the donation consent rate from 57% to 80% by 2020, in line with the better-performing countries in the world. That is the rate at which families who are approached by NHS Blood and Transplant actually go on to become donors afterwards. Although the consent rate has increased to 63%, it is still too far below this year's target of 70% and the 2020 target of 80%. Now is the time for us to do something about that.

I believe that the best way for us to increase the number of lives saved through organ donation is to adopt the so-called opt-out system—sometimes known as a system of deemed consent. Under the current law in England there is an opt-in system of organ donation. In other words, people must proactively state that on their death they would like their organs to be donated to someone else. And yet surveys consistently show that there are many more people who would like their organs to be donated when they die, but they are not registered. Polling conducted by the British Medical Association supports this and has shown that 66% of people in England would donate their organs after death, but only 39% have signed the organ donor register. That means millions of people here in England are willing to donate their organs, but are not registered to do so.

I am sure we all understand that people lead busy lives and that organ donation is not something most people think about on a day-to-day basis, but the reliance of the opt-in system on our not only thinking about it but finding the time to sign up is reducing the number of organs available and the number of lives saved. That is why many other countries use a different system.

Wales has had an opt-out system since December 2015 and only last month the Scottish Government announced plans for a similar system of organ donation in Scotland. In a statement, the Scottish Health Minister said:

"Moving to an opt-out system of organ and tissue donation will be part of the long-term cultural change in attitudes to encourage people to support donation."

That view is increasingly shared by countries around the world and by many of our European neighbours such as Austria, Belgium and Spain, which all use variations of the opt-out model. It is time that we in England joined them, modelling our system on that in Wales where they offer three clear options: first, to register someone's wish to be a donor by opting in to the system; secondly, to register their wish not to be a donor by opting out; and thirdly, to have their consent to donation deemed by taking no action.

It was argued when the law was passed that the availability of the three options would increase the number of organs available for donation, and that that in turn would save lives. I am pleased to say that the evidence from Wales suggests that such assertions were correct and that the new law is working. Indeed, the potential pool of organ donors has almost trebled since 2014-15, and the opt-out system does not appear to have deterred individuals from proactively opting in. It is right, of course, that we strike a note of caution with that data, but the initial signs are encouraging.

I now want to address some of the concerns that people have about an opt-out system of donation. This is undoubtedly an emotive issue and there are strong feelings on both sides of the debate. I would not want to question anybody's motives in deciding whether they wish to be a donor. It is, after all, a deeply personal matter. Under an opt-out system, people would not be required to give a reason for choosing not to be a donor, as the system is not about trying to shame people into becoming donors. Also, similar to what is happening in Wales, any new law would need to be accompanied by an active public awareness campaign: first, to ensure that people understand the new system; secondly, to encourage more people to make the positive

decision to become an organ donor; and thirdly, to give people who may want to opt out the information they need to do so.

I understand that some people have concerns that an opt-out process raises the risk that a person will have their organs taken against their will and against their families' wishes, which in turn could cause unnecessary distress to the families of the deceased. I also understand that such concerns may be more prevalent within some ethnic and religious groups and that some members of our Muslim and Jewish communities have different interpretations of the religious legitimacy of deceased donation. I completely get that. I understand their views and have the utmost respect and sympathy for them. However, I firmly and wholeheartedly believe that not only do the benefits of an opt-out system far outweigh the risks, but that the risks can be mitigated through a public awareness campaign tailored to different ethnic and religious communities and through the use of in-hospital safeguarding measures. Any new system would have to ensure there were safeguards in place to ensure that no one's organs were donated against their wishes; that the opt-out system applied only to those over the age of 18; and that for those under 18 it continued to be the case, as it was with my constituent Joe Dale, that the family have the final decision, because it is vital that nobody feels as though they are being coerced.

I also accept that changing the law is not the only change we need to make. It would need to be part of a wider package of measures to increase organ donation. We need to redouble our commitment to the "Taking Organ Transplantation to 2020" goal of increasing the consent rate to 80%, and to consider carefully whether the strategy needs strengthening in the light of the progress so far.

The evidence from Wales and from countries across Europe gives us the confidence to say that an opt-out system would be an important step forward. For that reason, I very much hope that we can proceed on a cross-party basis. I respect anyone who takes a different view on an issue of conscience such as this, but it is clear that the principle of deemed consent has support from Members of all parties across the House.

The Health Secretary recently told the House that an opt-out system has "a lot of merit". Only yesterday at Prime Minister's questions, the First Secretary of State told me that

"organ donation is clearly a hugely important part of our system, and the Department of Health is looking at the impact of those changes to see if those can give rise to further improvements in the number of available organs."—[*Official Report*, 12 July 2017; Vol. 627, c. 290.]

I welcome such statements because I know that an opt-out system has merit. When the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of Health, the hon Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), winds up the debate, will she tell us what work is taking place in her Department and when it will report?

Before I conclude, I want to take a moment to say how much my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) wanted to be here today. About a year ago, her daughter, Rebecca, a fit young marathon-running mother of one, had blood tests that indicated kidney failure. Three weeks ago she had surgery at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle to enable her to start dialysis. Today, she joins the 6,000 other people on a

waiting list for an organ donation. The average wait for a kidney on the transplant list is two years. I know that all hon. Members will want to join me in wishing Julie, Rebecca and their entire family all the very best. Also, I want to take this opportunity to thank charities such as Kidney Care UK for their work. Because of these stories we should move forward as quickly as possible; children such as Max and mothers such as Rebecca do not have the luxury of time to wait. Anything that we can do to help them get a new organ is a step worth taking so that they can join the thousands of people in our country who have benefited from organ donation.

We have a duty of care to those in our society who need help, and that includes those who need transplants. We can and must do more to help them. We cannot save the 457 lives lost last year, but who knows how many we could save in future? As an old friend once told me, "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now." I very much hope that the Government will act.

3.19 pm

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing the debate and on his sensitive and compassionate tone; I hope I can reciprocate. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is imperative to work to increase the number of organs available for donation, because every week people in this country die because there is a shortage of available organs. The critical question that we must ask today is whether presumed consent would help with that.

Presumed consent certainly seems an attractive proposition, but perhaps I may enter a note of caution, to aid our early deliberations on the matter. One of the key legal principles I was taught as a student lawyer was that silence is no reply, which means that, much as we might like to draw conclusions from silence, there are good reasons why it may be inappropriate to do so. Introducing the principle of presumed or deemed consent would involve a major change with respect to organ donation. It would effectively mean that even if someone did nothing at all—did not sign an organ donor register, or opt out or in—a consequence would be triggered. The person's silence would trigger a quite major action. Their organs could later be taken and transplanted. Consent would be deemed, although they would have done nothing.

Of course, some people, on seeing the publicity that might surround the introduction of presumed consent, would deliberately and knowingly decide to do nothing, aware of the consequence; they would be comfortable with that. Those people would be aware that they had, in doing nothing, effectively chosen to donate. However, there would inevitably be a significant group of people who missed the publicity altogether. We need to be sensitive to that.

Informed consent is an important principle, undergirding the relationship between the citizen and the state, so it is right that the House should explore the issue carefully, which is why I welcome the debate. It is critical to explore whether, for example, it is right in this instance to undermine the principle of informed consent by introducing presumed consent. Is it possible that that could create a precedent that might be appealed to in future for less enlightened purposes?

[Fiona Bruce]

Some practical concerns were highlighted during the debates in Wales that preceded the legislation there, some of which I did not feel were satisfactorily resolved at the time. When the Welsh Government made the case for introducing presumed consent, they based their case, at least in part, on a piece of research by two academics, Abadie and Gay:

“Evidence...suggests that introducing an opt-out type system could result in a 25 to 30 per cent increase in deceased organ donation rates which could equate to a further 15 donors each year in Wales, each of whom...on average might donate 3 organs. This means around 45 more organs could become available to the UK pool for transplantation.”

I understand that the research compared practices in other jurisdictions, and classified Spain, the country with the highest donation rate in the world, as a presumed consent country. Spain introduced presumed consent legislation in 1979, but the law has never been implemented; Spain is still in practice an informed consent jurisdiction like England. Indeed, rates of donation there started to increase only when, 10 years later, Spain made other changes, in particular investment in the organ donation infrastructure. It increased the capacity, training and availability of medical staff to talk to families about donating the organs of a loved one when a life has tragically been cut short.

A leading expert in the field, Professor John Fabre, unsuccessfully tried to point out to the Welsh Government their misconception. In an article entitled “Presumed consent for organ donation” in the journal *Clinical Medicine*, he referred to their explanatory memorandum, published in December 2012, to the Bill that became the Human Transplantation (Wales) Act 2013. It stated:

“For example, an opt-out system is operated in Spain and it has the highest donation rate in the world.”

As I have said, Spain, even today, does not operate an opt-out system, so I believe that that statement was incorrect, even though it was cited in official papers in Wales, underpinning the presumed consent legislation. The recognition that the country with the highest donation rate in the world does not in fact operate a presumed consent system is important in any assessment of the efficacy of presumed consent. It is also striking that some of the countries that are least successful with their organ donation rates, including Sweden, Greece and Bulgaria, operate presumed consent.

A second objection raised during the debate in Wales was the fact that in some countries the introduction of presumed consent has been associated with significant numbers of people withdrawing from donation. Some people interpret the introduction of presumed consent, despite its noble motivation, as the state seeking to claim their organs without proper consent. Rather than seeing it as a mechanism for donation, they see it as a mechanism for bypassing consent to donation. There has been some evidence of that in Wales. Giving oral evidence to the Health and Social Care Committee of the National Assembly for Wales, organ transplant specialist Dr Peter Matthews, who was based in Morriston Hospital in Swansea, said:

“My own experience is that the British psyche has a particular view that what it should do is donate organs as an altruistic gift, and if it is felt that the state is going to take over the organs, then there is the potential that people who may have been willing to become a donor will not do so. We have seen two cases in

Morriston where patients who were on the organ donation register, on hearing about this, said to their families that if the state was going to take their organs, they were no longer willing to give them. We lost two donations”.

During the debate on the Bill in Wales, three Assembly Members relayed similar stories from constituents.

I want to comment on the impact of presumed consent in Wales. NHS Blood and Transplant records donations on a yearly basis, from April to April, and the first full year of results that we have from Wales is for 2016-17. The data tell us two important things: first, in 2016-17, 61 deceased donors facilitated 135 organ donations. Far from representing the anticipated increase of 15 donors and 45 organs, that apparently constituted a decline by three donors and 33 organ donations from the previous year's figures. That might come as something of a surprise, because some people have suggested that the system was a great success. However, under informed consent a family can donate the organs of a deceased person if the deceased has signed neither the organ donation register nor the opt-out register, which means that, as we have heard, in Wales prior to December 2015 the families or living representatives of the deceased could—as they can here—decide to donate their loved one's organs. But under presumed consent those informed consent donations would be reclassified as presumed consent donations. Critically, that does not mean that those donations would not have happened under the old system.

Secondly, and not surprisingly, bearing in mind what Dr Matthews told the Assembly, there has been a huge increase in the number of people in Wales opting out. In 2016-17, 174,886 people in Wales were on the opt-out register. That figure far outstrips comparable figures for other parts of the UK, where consent is not presumed. Only 27,559 individuals in England, 1,834 in Scotland and 204 in Northern Ireland have opted out. That means that a staggering 85.5% of individuals in the UK who have opted out live in Wales, despite the population of Wales representing only 4.8% of the UK population.

I have cited a lot of figures, but I do so to get them on the record and to aid our debate. To appreciate fully the cost of the change in Wales, we must remember that prior to the introduction of presumed consent, people who had signed neither the opt-out register nor the opt-in register were potential donors.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree with the Welsh Government's conclusion that 40 lives have been saved under the presumed consent scheme that would have been lost under the previous arrangement?

**Fiona Bruce:** My concern is to demonstrate that we have to look very carefully at some of the evidence that the Welsh Government used to come to their conclusions.

Where someone has signed the opt-out register, conversations cannot even begin. That means that more than 174,000 of the Welsh population have effectively been removed as potential donors. Previously, in the absence of express direction to do otherwise, those people's families, as their living representatives, might have been happy to donate their loved ones' organs at their death. When Wales embraced presumed consent, the other UK jurisdictions said that they would wait to

review the results in Wales before deciding whether they wanted to go down that path. I ask the Minister to look at the evidence.

We have significantly increased donation levels in England since implementing the recommendations of the organ donation taskforce in 2008, which of course came down very much against presumed consent. Rather than seeking to emulate Wales, England should perhaps seek to emulate Spain and put its emphasis on lowering the family refusal rate by increasing the number of clinicians who are trained and available to discuss this issue with families when the need arises—often at short notice.

Professor Fabre concluded his seminal paper in *Clinical Medicine* in the following terms:

“Rather than legislating for the consent of donors, we should be addressing the misgivings and misunderstandings of families so that they decline donation much less frequently, as has been done so successfully in Spain. An acceptance rate of 85% is a realistic and achievable objective for the UK over a 5-year period. As previously, we have the Spanish model to guide us. It will not be easy. It will require...a detailed plan at the national level”.

I very much hope that the Minister will consider all those points and confirm that the Government will take into account every possible consideration and concern about this issue before any legislation is introduced. I look forward to her response.

3.33 pm

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing this debate and on the clarity and comprehensiveness of his speech. He covered the ground in commendable fashion and hit the significant factors involved.

The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) rehashed the debate in Wales. She mainly addressed opinions and fears that were expressed before the change was made in Wales. I am sure that those fears were sincere, but they have not been realised in the way that she suggests. It is not important that the Welsh Government might not have had entirely accurate evidence; evidence rarely is entirely reliable, and there may have been misunderstandings. What is crucial is the outcome, which is impressive. At least 40 lives were saved—at least 40 people are alive today who would not have been had the presumed consent Bill not passed. As my hon. Friend said, the figure for lives lost in England is 457. That is an extraordinary number of people. If there were an accident today in which that number of lives was lost, that would be our main concern.

My interest in this issue began in 2012, when my 22-year-old constituent Matthew Lammas came here to lobby me and my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden). That young man was in need of a heart transplant. He had a heartbreaking story of so many false alarms. He would get a call at perhaps 2 o'clock in the morning to drive to Middlesbrough or Birmingham, but halfway up he would get another call to say, “Sorry; somebody else got the heart—someone got here before you.” Six months after he visited me here, I attended his funeral. A 22-year-old man's life was lost. I am absolutely convinced that, had we taken the bold decision to introduce presumed consent in Wales six years ago, we would be in a far better position and Matthew Lammas's life would not have been lost in that way. Those are the simple facts.

There have been extraordinary changes in Wales since the passage of the presumed consent Bill. No one in Wales has died for lack of an organ since that system came into effect. In 2015-16, 214 organ transplants were carried out and 192 patients were on the organ donation waiting list. There was a great deal of concern in Wales, and we all understand that; we all know the feeling of wanting to treat the bodies of our loved ones with reverence and care. There is something that upsets us profoundly about the idea of organ transplantation. There are also genuine religious objections, which were played out again and again in Wales. But I come back to my point: look at the outcome.

There has also been a huge change in public opinion in Wales. In 2014-15, 48.5% of the people of Wales had consented to donating their organs. The figure leapt to 64% in two years. Public opinion has come around to this. We must congratulate the *Daily Mirror*, which demonstrated tabloid journalism at its very best. I am not sure that this sells many papers, but it has, for all the best reasons, boldly sought to ensure that this life-saving measure is introduced. We can now have great optimism, because my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson), who came sixth in the private Member's Bill ballot, announced that he will take this issue up, and there is every chance that the spirit of this Parliament will take it forward.

We rejoiced this week when a decision was taken about the long-standing injustice of contaminated blood. We have come to a consensus about that, and the Government have shown themselves willing to move forward and introduce valuable reform. When I introduced my Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill in the last Parliament, my contact with the Government was entirely friendly. They were reasonable; they were cautious in reaching conclusions but made it clear that the door was open for reform soon. We can change that figure of 457 avoidable deaths. We must move rapidly and find consensus among all parties to take the clear and unambiguous lesson from Wales that presumed organ donation consent saves lives.

3.39 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on presenting what I thought was a passionate, honest and fair contribution. This is a matter I am also interested in and seriously believe in. I will say early on that I subscribe to the opinion put forward by the hon. Gentleman, because I feel that is the way things should be. That is a personal opinion. All of us here obviously agree that organ donation is important, but we might look at it in different ways.

I am not interested in this only because of my role as the DUP's health spokesperson; I also have a personal interest relating to family members. The hon. Gentleman gave the example of one of his constituents. My nephew Peter was born with a kidney the size of a peanut, which is probably fairly hard for people to comprehend. From the day he was born to the day he had the transplant, he was on dialysis treatment, which, once someone has started, they cannot come off. I am very aware of the issue, and I will make an honest, personal contribution to the debate.

Someone in this world donated that kidney to Peter, who is alive today because of it. The alternatives were looked at by the family, and everyone looked at it in the



[*Jim Shannon*]

way that they thought best. His mother was going to give her kidney, but then she became pregnant, so that opportunity fell away. In the meantime, someone else came forward with a kidney donation, which Peter had. Peter is the same age as my second boy, so I can quite honestly relate to the difference between the two boys as they grew up. I understand the importance of organ donation, and believe that people certainly should be on the register.

I was on the Organ Donation Northern Ireland website just before we came here, and the first sentence I read really impacted upon me:

“Most people would accept an organ if they needed one.”

That is not really surprising, is it? Yet only 40% of us in Northern Ireland have signed the NHS organ donor register. We would all want an organ donation if we needed it, but we have not all signed up. I have to ask the question honestly, sincerely and fairly to those here: if that is the issue, would they not donate their organ? I know that I would.

I carry a wee organ donation card, although it does not make any difference. It is long faded because it has been in my wallet—they say that the money in that wallet is like a prisoner, but that is by the by. I signed up for the card when I was 18, although that is no longer necessary, because when people sign up for their driving licence and tick that box, they are registered forever. That is how we do it in Northern Ireland. The card is very faded, but it says:

“I would like to help someone to live after my death”.

That is its purpose.

I was returned for Strangford with 42% of the vote in 2015, and this year—I thank the people of Strangford for this—I was returned with 62%. I have to tell hon. Members that it is a much better position to be in this time around than in 2015. It is a lot more safe and secure, but how much more so for those who need donations as a matter of life or death? Last year, 12 people died in Northern Ireland while waiting for an organ transplant. That may not seem a huge number, but speak to those 12 families and hear exactly what it means to them. Every one of us in the Chamber—those in the Gallery and hon. Members who are contributing—will know exactly what it means. It is a phenomenal loss.

The sad fact is that some people who passed away in that same year may well have wanted their lives to make a difference by donating their organs, but because their families did not know, it did not happen. It is about raising awareness, having the debate today and every one of us searching our souls and consciences for how to respond. It is really important that we do so; it is a conscious decision that everyone should consider. I completely believe that this is a matter of conscience. In fairness, the hon. Member for Barnsley Central said that in his contribution. He recognises that it is a matter of conscience, and I heard that in what others said as well.

I will look down on no one who feels that, due to a religious belief or some other belief, they cannot donate their organs. That is freedom of belief in action and the conscience clause is important, but what I cannot understand is someone who simply refuses to consider

or discuss the possibility. I agree with the Welsh example: I believe that people should be on the list unless they opt out. We have to up the ante and move forward constructively.

I mentioned the case of my nephew. There is another case that I always remember. There was a gentleman in Newtownards whose son was injured in a car accident. Unfortunately, he was on life support and was going to die. His dad told me that his son, by his death and donation, was able to save six lives. In Newtownards we also have a very active group of people who are donation recipients. The council at that time—it was called Ards Council then; it is now Ards and North Down Borough Council—had made a remembrance garden, which we had an opening ceremony for. Many people in not only my constituency but across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland understand exactly what this means.

The last time I spoke about organ donation in this Chamber, I said that 30% of people in the UK were registered to donate. That figure is now 36%. That is great, but it is still not enough. That is why we have to do something and look seriously and honestly at what is being proposed today. Registered donor numbers have increased every year since 2012 and are 20% higher than five years ago, yet three people a day are still dying needing a transplant. Is that right? No, it is not. We have to do something about that. The figure could be lower if people were prepared to think or talk to loved ones about it.

I see so many driving licence forms in my office. It is not for me to judge, and I will not—I never judge anybody on donation—but on too many of those driving licence forms people have not ticked the box to say that they want to be a donor. I do not know why they have not done it. It is up to them to make their own mind up, but when our time comes to pass on from this side of the world, we can help someone. If I can help someone with this old, fragile, diabetes 2 body standing here, why should I not? It is time that people understood the importance of this decision.

I am conscious that other Members want to speak, so I will not ramble on too much longer, but I want to make a wee comment about Wales. We are all aware that in Wales, where they have had so-called deemed consent since December 2015, only 6% of the population has chosen to opt out, which speaks volumes. More importantly, in that one year in Wales, as the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) said, 39 organs were transplanted through deemed consent out of a total of 160 transplants. That 39 out of 160 was a significant contribution to saving lives. Why should we not do that? I cannot get my head around it at all.

I will finish with this, because you are giving me the eye, Ms Buck, so I need to be careful. I urge people to be aware of the decision and the impact that it can have on families. We must take more positive steps to see a better take-up of organ donation, while always ensuring that people can make the choice themselves. I am conscious of the conscience clause. The simple fact is this: we can save lives in our deaths. Let us encourage people to do this in a manner that is sensitive and yet makes clear the case that we would nearly all take an organ if we needed one—would we not?—and should therefore all be willing to give one.

3.48 pm

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Buck. I want to start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on not just securing this debate but taking the opportunity to raise this incredibly important issue at Prime Minister's questions yesterday.

I am pleased to hear that my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson) will be introducing his presumed consent private Member's Bill when he gets his opportunity on a Friday. I hope we will not see a repeat of the usual filibustering, which means we cannot have a proper debate and do not get the opportunity to vote on the Bill. It is really important that the House finally gets the chance to express its view on this matter, and that will not happen if the Bill is simply talked out.

I want to reiterate the concern that has been expressed about our not being on target to achieve an 80% consent rate for donation after death by 2019-20. We have missed the strategy's interim targets every single year. More needs to be done to make a difference and to save lives. We have a moral obligation to do something, which in this case means introducing presumed consent. It is neither perfect nor a panacea for all the issues surrounding organ donation but, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central and others who spoke in the debate, it would make significant difference.

A constituent contacted me today about her severely disabled son. She is concerned that he lacks capacity to opt out and she is worried that in the medical profession's view some lives may be worth less than others. It is important to give people such as my constituent the reassurance they need, and that is not just about the right to opt out. As we have seen in Wales, where there is a soft opt-out procedure, families still get consulted. It is important to put people's minds at rest.

Across Bristol, there are more than 182,000 people on the register, with more than 38,000 in my constituency. In March, 27 people in the city were on the active transplant list, 13 of whom were in my constituency. Last year, there were 10 deceased donors and 22 deceased donor transplants. At the moment, we are not quite keeping up with demand.

Cystic fibrosis is a subject dear to my heart, not least because my 12-year-old niece, Maisie, has it. It is a life-limiting illness that affects 10,800 people in the UK and most of them will need a lung transplant to extend their life and improve their quality of life. I want to take the opportunity, slightly gratuitously, to pay tribute to Maisie's 14-year-old brother, Isaac, and her 17-year-old sister, Lilli, who did a 65 km—40 mile—walk across the Peak district the weekend before last to raise a few thousand pounds for the Cystic Fibrosis Trust. It was quite a trek.

The trust does brilliant work to raise funds and to support the families of people with cystic fibrosis, most of whom will need a lung transplant at some point. About 50 cystic fibrosis patients receive a transplant each year. It is the third most common reason for lung transplantation. Such patients have the best outcome, with 60% of recipients living at least five years after donation.

At any time, about 60 people with cystic fibrosis are on the transplant waiting list. Patients on the list are generally not expected to live more than a couple of

years if they do not receive a transplant. One in three will die before they can receive one, so you will understand, Ms Buck, why it is important to me that we up the donation rate and make sure that lungs are available whenever possible.

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust does not see opt out as the only answer. I am sure the Minister knows that it has been calling for a national allocation system so that there is less of a postcode lottery and it is not just people who are fortunate enough to be in a place where lungs are available for transplant who get them. Last month, NHS Blood and Transplant announced that it would move from a regional system to a fairer national allocation system for urgent cases. The Cystic Fibrosis Trust has, of course, welcomed that.

Organ donation is complicated. It is not just a case of finding available lungs and a donor who wants them. According to the Cystic Fibrosis Trust, 75% of clinically usable donor lungs are not used. It wants more training for doctors because only three doctors in the UK can downsize lungs to make them suitable for smaller patients. It is often teenagers and people in their early 20s who have poor lung capacity and need new, downsized lungs. Will the Minister consider training more people to ensure lungs can be used?

Repairing sub-optimal lungs to make them suitable for transplant is also an issue. Spain has the highest organ donation rate in the world not just because of its opt-out system but because it has medically trained transplant co-ordinators, uses intensive care beds better and more frequently, has different admission criteria for its intensive care units and uses more high-risk donors.

I appreciate that we are talking specifically about presumed consent, but I want to ensure the Minister is aware of all the wider issues. I hope she will work on those as well as supporting the opt-out Bill.

3.54 pm

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): I am delighted to be having this debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing it. He told us the moving stories of Max and Joe, bringing a human aspect to the debate. He underlined that deaths are preventable, but that although 66% of people in England would donate, only 39% are on the donor register. Combined with the knowledge that only a small number of people on the register of donors will be able to donate, that highlights the fact that there is clearly a lot of work to be done.

The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) added a few notes of caution, with the view of aiding an informed debate. There are always at least two sides to a debate, and being informed does us no harm. Unfortunately, she is no longer in her seat to hear me say so; to me, hanging on for an entire debate is important.

The hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), speaking in his own inimitable style and even summing up the debate for me at one stage, told the story of Matthew, a 22-year-old man who unfortunately lost his life, and the feeling that had a system been in place back then, an operation could have been available and his life might have been saved. The hon. Gentleman also urged England to follow Wales's lead by implementing a soft opt-out scheme.

[*Ronnie Cowan*]

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke about his nephew Peter, who required a kidney and fortunately got one, and is alive today due to that donation. Not everyone in Northern Ireland has been as fortunate. He also highlighted that one donor can save multiple lives.

The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) spoke about missed targets, saying that no plan is perfect, which reminded me of the Churchill quote:

“Perfection is the enemy of progress.”

She also spoke passionately about the needs of those with cystic fibrosis.

There were a few false starts, but now that the Welsh Government’s soft opt-out is up and running, the Scottish Government have announced plans to do the same thing. An independent evaluation of the implementation of the Welsh opt-out system is due to be published in December 2017, and we believe that the numbers will be encouraging, but if even one donor has been identified, it must be worth it. The British Medical Association has stated that it believes that, over time, an opt-out scheme promotes more positive social attitudes to donations, so it may well be that we will not see the benefits for a few years to come.

I believe that the most important people in this debate are the many waiting for a donor—those whose lives are poorer or even on the line as they wait, and wait. This is not solely about saving lives; it is about improving them. One donation does not simply save or improve one life; it has a knock-on effect. My colleague Iain Fraser would not have been born if his father Sandy had not received a kidney many years ago. I thank Sandy Fraser for his ongoing commitment and work in his capacity as the chairman of the Scottish Kidney Federation.

I ask Members: if they had a loved one, as many of us do, whose life could be transformed by receiving an organ donation, would they not turn over every single stone and investigate every possibility in order to identify a donor? I hope that is what we are about to do. In my view, a soft opt-out scheme is the path to go down, but whatever comes of this debate, it must stimulate discussion. We should all make our wishes known to our friends and family. When my time comes, as it will, please take whatever you want.

3.58 pm

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) for securing this debate, his excellent contribution and all the work that he has done in recent weeks to raise awareness of the need for more people to become organ donors. I commend other hon. Members for their thoughtful contributions to this debate; the *Daily Mirror* for raising awareness of organ donation since the case of Max Johnson, a nine-year-old boy in need of a new heart; and the more than 9,000 people who signed the Change.org petition.

I also pay my respects to other hon. Members who have brought this issue to our attention over the last decade or so. They include my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), who

introduced a private Member’s Bill on this topic back in 2004, and my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), who introduced a private Member’s Bill more recently and who spoke so well today.

I will quickly set the scene on organ donation in the wider sense and then move on to the situation in countries such as Wales and Spain, in which opt-out systems have been introduced. Finally, I will talk about three tests that Opposition Members would like the Government to look at, if such a system were implemented in England, to ensure that patients, NHS staff and community groups could have confidence in such a change in the law.

There is no doubt about the need for more organ donors in England. We have heard about that so clearly today. With so many people on the waiting list for new organs, it is important that we get more people signing up to donate their organs so that we can ensure that more people have the chance to live. That is why it is welcome that in a written answer last year, the then Public Health Minister, Nicola Blackwood, confirmed that since 2008 organ donation across the UK had increased by 68% and transplants by 47%, and that 2015-16 saw the highest ever deceased donor rate in the UK, with 1,364 deceased donors resulting in 3,529 transplants.

However, as we have heard, there is still a lot more to do because, tragically, 1,000 people every year die while waiting for a transplant. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central, 6,388 people in Britain need a transplant. That includes 183 children. It also includes Rebecca, the adult daughter of my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour the Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott). I send my hon. Friend, Rebecca and all her wider family my best wishes, as I am sure we all do.

Like the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and, I am sure, others here today, I am a card-carrying organ donor. As soon as I became old enough to carry a card, I did, and that was also because of a direct family experience of someone requiring organ donation. My Auntie Ella was one of the pioneers of organ donation when she received a kidney transplant at the fantastic Freeman Hospital in Newcastle. That was about 50 years ago. I have just looked this up: the first organ donations at the Freeman were in 1967, so my Auntie Ella was literally one of the first. She had a very young family at the time. I was born in ’66, but I can remember being told that all she wanted was to live long enough to see her children grow up. Well, she saw her children grow up, get married and go on to give her grandchildren. That is what organ donation is all about: it gives people a future.

There are issues, though, when it comes to black and minority ethnic communities. NHS Blood and Transplant reported that 66% of people from BME communities in the UK refuse to donate their organs, despite being more likely to need a new organ because of a predisposition to certain illnesses, such as diabetes and hypertension. I will cover that issue when I come to the three tests that we would need to set. It is why it is welcome that we have had an opportunity today to debate this issue and everything that comes with it and to think about how we go about improving organ donation, alongside considering what my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central set out on the principle of an opt-out system.

Currently, we know of two countries in which opt-out organ donation systems work: Wales, which we heard quite a bit about today, and Spain. As we heard, Scotland is also considering how it can introduce an opt-out scheme. In Wales, the system was brought in via the Human Transplantation (Wales) Act 2013, which came into force in 2015. The new law sets out that those who live and die in Wales will be deemed to have given consent for their organs to be used unless they have explicitly said otherwise—that is the opt-out.

According to the Organ Donation Wales website, a public awareness campaign before the change in the law came into effect resulted in the numbers of organs transplanted increasing from 120 to 160. NHS organ donation statistics have shown an 11.8% increase between 2014-15 and 2016-17 in people in Wales opting in to donate their organs—the highest increase among England, Wales and Scotland. However, a written answer from the Minister present today, based on NHS Blood and Transplant figures, stated that

“there has been no notable change in Welsh deceased donation figures since the change in legislation”.

This is backed up by NHS organ donation statistics, which show that despite the opt-out system in Wales, there were more deceased organ donors in England and Scotland. That could be because the system is still in its early days; people who have not opted out are still alive and have not yet been able to donate their organs.

Further afield, our friends in Spain have had a soft opt-out system since 1979, in which consent is presumed in the absence of any known objection by the deceased, but family consent is still sought. The implementation of that system led to a small increase in organ donation and transplant, but there was a dramatic increase after 1989 when the Spanish Government made a big push to reorganise organ donation, as a result of which there was a medically trained transplant co-ordinator in every hospital by 1999. However, as a 2012 British Medical Association report stated, there are likely to be differences between the UK and Spain’s performance on organ donation because of their different approaches to resources and clinical practices. For example, Spain has a higher number of intensive care beds, different ICU admissions criteria and end-of-life practices, and the use of higher-risk donors in comparison with those used here.

Nevertheless, those two examples give us food for thought on the change in organ donation rules in England. They show that if we implement this policy, we need to get it right. It is important that we learn from what has already happened, adapting and using what we learn from other countries to get it right in this country. I hope the Minister and her officials will be busy doing that after the debate.

Labour will set three tests for the Government if any new organ donation system is introduced in England. First, they must obviously ensure full public awareness of any change in the organ donation rules. Secondly, they must ensure that medical and healthcare professionals are involved in designing any changes to the system and that they have the support to raise awareness among the public. Thirdly, they must promise to work closely with community groups to ensure that cultural and religious views are fully consulted on and taken into account before any change is introduced. Those three tests are based on work done in other countries, notably Spain and Wales, but also on the current situation

across the UK, where there have been documented issues with engaging with BME communities on organ donation.

Organ donation and transplantation is a sensitive issue, as we have heard in this debate. Many people have strong and differing opinions on it, and it is crucial that the Government ensure that all voices are listened to so that we can come up with a solution. These real problems must be addressed. We know of many people who are on transplant waiting lists for far too long. Sometimes people die because they have been on the waiting list for years without a match to save their lives. We need considered action by the Minister and the Government. They must look at the issue carefully, consult with the public, ensure that solutions are found and bring about the improvements needed. I trust that the Minister will endeavour to do just that.

4.8 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jackie Doyle-Price):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I thank all Members who have participated in this debate. Organ donation has been such an established practice in the NHS for quite some years that we often forget about it. The way that everyone has brought the subject to life today, with references to their own stories and experiences, has reminded all of us how important it is. Perhaps it is time this subject had some renewed focus, if only to raise awareness and encourage people to opt in, whether or not we ultimately introduce an opt-out system.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis). He could not have done a better service to his constituents Joe Dale and Max Johnson in the way he expressed his argument with considerable persuasion. Perhaps through him, I could send my good wishes to Joe Dale’s family. I hope they get some comfort from the fact that Joe lives on by giving life to others. As we know, one organ donor can save or transform up to nine lives. What better legacy can we have than for other people to live on? We, as Members of Parliament, could perhaps be more proactive in giving that message, as we breathe life into this much neglected subject.

I am told that we last considered organ donation on the Floor of the House in 2014. This opportunity to discuss it is very welcome, and we will have many more opportunities, given the confirmation from the hon. Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson) that he will use his private Member’s Bill to push this issue forward. I am sure it will get a good airing.

The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) presented tests at the end of her speech for what we should bear in mind when deciding what to do in this space. I think we should do all those things, in any case, as we talk about kidney donation. The key has to be public awareness and ensuring that medical professionals do their bit to encourage people to participate in organ donation. We must also engage with community groups where there is a specific problem. That is my biggest priority.

I want to say a bit more about the context. Obviously, we want to encourage as many people as possible to make clear their intention to donate after death and to have that conversation with their families. That is often where the decision is made. Medical professionals need the requisite training to have these sensitive conversations.

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

As the hon. Member for Barnsley Central mentioned, not many people understand the system of organ donation. We can all sign up to be on the donor register, but not all of us will be in a position for our organs to be used. Quite often, organs can be used after an unexpected and traumatic death, and it is very difficult for any medical professional to have a conversation with the family about what should happen to the deceased's organs. We need to have a lot more understanding and be a lot more willing to make it clear to our loved ones that we would want our organs to be donated if we were ever unfortunately in that position.

I must pay tribute to all those in the national health service who work in this area. Their determination and commitment makes donation and transplantation possible. Although we still need more transplants, we have seen a significant increase in donations in the UK. We saw 1,413 donors giving 3,712 transplants in the last year, which illustrates how many lives can be saved by one successful approach to donation.

It is incredible that, as NHS Blood and Transplant told us only this week, more than 50,000 people are now alive thanks to organ donation and transplantation. The first transplants took place in my lifetime, and they were seen as revolutionary. One reason we have not given this subject as much attention is that donations now tend to be seen as commonplace.

There is much to celebrate, but there is also much more to do, not least because 457 people died last year while on the active transplant waiting list. That ignores the 875 people who were removed from the list because they had become too ill to receive a transplant. Many of those will have died shortly afterwards. At any one time some 6,500 people are on the waiting list, and again, although waiting times are declining, we cannot be complacent. We need to make sure that those people have hope that, when they are on the list, they have a realistic chance of receiving a transplant.

Our biggest challenge is black, Asian and minority ethnic donors, for two reasons. First, black and Asian people are more at risk of illnesses that may require a transplant, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, and secondly, the consent rate for those communities is half that of the white population. The same is true for blood, so we need many more blood donors from the black community. There is a constant need for that because of the prevalence of sickle cell anaemia, but we know that only 1% of the nation's blood donors are black. So we need to do much more not only in organ donation but in blood donation.

There is some encouraging news. Last year, more than 6.4% of all deceased donors were from black and Asian communities. That is a significant increase, so the direction of travel is positive, but we need to do much more. Average waiting times for kidney transplants have fallen for everyone, and that rise in donations from black and Asian communities has meant that the biggest fall in waiting times is for black and Asian patients—down from four years to two and a half over the past seven years. The direction of travel is good, but we need to do more, because people from black and Asian communities still wait at least six months longer than white patients. That problem needs to be tackled, because recipients are matched according to blood and tissue types, which differ across ethnic groups.

As we set out in our manifesto, we are determined to target that audience, and we welcome the involvement of all hon. Members in that. We are looking at other partner agencies, and we are working with the National Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Transplant Alliance. However, many other groups need to be engaged, not least to tackle misplaced cultural concerns about donation. It is not incompatible with Christian beliefs to bequeath one's organs, and we need to make sure that that message gets out loud and clear by engaging with all community leaders in this space.

We have heard some persuasive arguments on opt-outs and why we should move towards an opt-out system, and I certainly understand the thinking behind that proposal. To add my personal experience of this, my constituent Patricia Carroll regularly lobbies me on the subject. Her daughter Natalie suffered from anorexia and diabetes, and died awaiting a kidney and pancreas transplant. Patricia tried to donate her own kidney to Natalie but was not a match. Following Natalie's death, she decided to become a live donor. Last year—I think it was around Christmas—she gave a kidney to a 22-year-old young man called Joe who had been on dialysis for three or four years.

What Patricia has done for that family—it is the family, not just the individual—has transformed their lives. I again pay tribute to all live donors. That is an incredibly altruistic thing to do when recognising the impact it can have on the donor's own health. It is amazing, particularly when there are donors who have absolutely no personal relationship with the beneficiary of their organ. Patricia will be watching with interest to see what I have to say about this.

There are obvious attractions to opt-outs as a tool; anything that will increase the pool of available organs will obviously be attractive. However, opt-outs on their own are not a panacea, and the references to what we can learn from Spain are significant. The issue is about what is wrapped around that. Specifically, it is not just about public understanding and public awareness of why we need donation and what it means, but about how the medical profession deals with it.

The crucial point that affects donation is the conversation in the room between medical professionals and bereaved families. We have seen examples of families refusing consent because they are not convinced that their relatives wanted to donate and it feels safer to say no. Equally, we have seen that being overruled. We find that the highest rates of donation are achieved when we have specially trained nurses who have that conversation with the family in a sensitive way. When such conversations take place, rates of donation go up significantly. Those conversations are critical. If we look at the experience of Spain, we see that that injection of medical advice achieved the step change in donation rates, over and above having an opt-out system.

None the less, we are interested to see the experience in Wales. We are certainly prepared to consider that, and obviously we need to consider it sooner than we might have intended, given the private Member's Bill, but opt-out will never be a silver bullet to achieve more donation. We are committed to ensuring that we do whatever we can to increase donation. Our strategy, "Taking Organ Transplantation to 2020", contained the ambitious targets that the hon. Member for Barnsley Central mentioned. Although we have not actually achieved

the 70% that we are aiming for, the direction of travel is positive. The fact that more than 23.5 million people have opted in to donate their organs is quite an achievement, although I am not complacent. To give credit where credit is due, the NHS and everybody involved have achieved a great deal in achieving those figures.

The key thing is the availability of specialist nurses. We must ensure that organ donation is embedded as a normal consideration of end-of-life care, where that is available. We have looked at developing a new organ donor register that makes it easier for people to opt in. We are trying to make available as many opportunities as possible for people to do that, for example when people sign up for a new driving licence. In any interaction with Government, we need to give people that option, because where it is a positive choice, it is more likely to be effective.

**Jim Shannon:** We all agree about the need to raise awareness on the mainland and across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. When it comes to raising awareness—I presume the Minister will do so imminently—will she engage with the Northern Ireland Assembly, provided that it is still going, and with Scotland and Wales to ensure that we have a UK-wide programme of awareness to get people on the register?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. He might have seen that I am wearing a pin, which is a nice pink heart that says, “Yes”. That campaign is being run by NHSBT to highlight the need for people to offer to be a donor. If people are prepared to do it, they should wear this nice pin. We need to use any number of the tools at our disposal, and we need to be a lot more imaginative about the ones we use. I look forward to seeing him with his nice pink heart.

I should conclude my remarks to allow the hon. Member for Barnsley Central an opportunity to respond to the debate. I think that we are all united in the outcome we are trying to achieve, which is to encourage more people to be willing to donate their organs to achieve more transplants. With regard to the tools we employ to achieve that, we will look at opt-out and consider whether that would do anything, but in the meantime we are prioritising engagement with black and minority ethnic communities. We will continue to invest in specialised nursing to have those very sensitive conversations, because they need to happen. We will look at what more we can do to encourage more families to be willing to give consent at the time it needs to be given. I thank everyone for contributing to the debate.

4.24 pm

**Dan Jarvis:** This has been a constructive and useful debate, and I am grateful that we have had contributions from Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England. The reality, as the Minister said, is that this is a serious, sensitive and complex subject, but ultimately it is about saving lives.

It was a great privilege to meet Max Johnson’s mother yesterday, and I pay tribute to the Johnson family for their stoicism and the fact that they are prepared to talk about their experiences. Speaking as a parent, I can only imagine how difficult it must be for them. Today, Max Johnson sits in hospital in Newcastle, waiting and urgently hoping that an organ donation will be made available to him.

As I said in my opening remarks, we all have a responsibility to do everything we can. We have a duty of care to people more generally, and that particularly includes those who require some form of donation. We can learn a lot from what is happening across Europe and in Wales. I am delighted that there are moves afoot to move to a similar system in Scotland.

I was obviously very pleased to hear that my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson) will be introducing a private Member’s Bill, which will have its First Reading next week and its Second Reading at some point in the autumn. That provides a valuable opportunity for us in this House to have a further discussion.

As the Minister again rightly said, there is no silver bullet solution. If the Government were to be persuaded that moving to an opt-out system was the right thing to do, that would have to be accompanied by a range of other measures, not least further publicity to raise awareness so that, collectively, we can all encourage people to sign up and be organ donors.

I am not prone to making predictions, but I will say, in conclusion, that I think that at some point we will move to an opt-out system in England. It is my strong belief and hope that we do that sooner rather than later, because I am confident that to do so would save countless lives.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the matter of the introduction of an opt-out system for organ donation in England.

4.26 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Thursday 13 July 2017

## TREASURY

### Finance Bill

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):** The Finance Bill introduced in March 2017 provided for a number of changes to tax legislation that were withdrawn from the Bill after the calling of the general election. The then Financial Secretary to the Treasury confirmed at the point they were withdrawn that there was no policy change and that these provisions would be legislated for at the first opportunity in the new Parliament.

The Government confirm that intention. They expect to introduce a Finance Bill as soon as possible after the summer recess containing the withdrawn provisions. Where policies have been announced as applying from the start of the 2017-18 tax year or other point before the introduction of the forthcoming Finance Bill, there is no change of policy and these dates of application will be retained. Those affected by the provisions should continue to assume that they will apply as originally announced.

The Finance Bill to be introduced will legislate for policies that have already been announced. In the case of some provisions that will apply from a time before the Bill is introduced, technical adjustments and additions to the versions contained in the March Bill will be made on introduction to ensure that they function as intended. To maximise certainty about the exact provisions that will apply, the Government are today publishing updated draft provisions.

The Finance Bill will include legislation for the Making Tax Digital (MTD) programme. Having listened carefully to the concerns raised by the Treasury Committee, parliamentarians and stakeholders, the Government are announcing policy changes that will be reflected in the legislation to be introduced. Businesses will not be mandated to use the MTD system until April 2019 and then only to meet VAT obligations. This will apply to businesses with turnover above the VAT threshold. Businesses with turnover below the VAT threshold will not be required to use the system but can choose to do so. Businesses will also be able to opt in for other taxes, benefiting from a streamlined, digital experience.

The Government will not widen the scope of MTD beyond VAT before the system has been shown to work well, and not before April 2020 at the earliest. This will ensure that there is time to test the system fully and for digital record keeping to become more widespread.

[HCWS47]

### Fiscal Risks Report

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss):** The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has today published its first fiscal risks report (FRR). The report highlights that although the Government have made significant progress in reducing the deficit, debt remains high leaving the economy and public finances vulnerable

in the event of shocks. The FRR fulfils the OBR's legal obligation to publish a statement setting out the main risks to the public finances at least once every two years. It was laid before Parliament earlier today and copies are available in the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office.

The Government welcome this first FRR which keeps the UK at the frontier of fiscal practice worldwide. The establishment of the OBR has ensured that policy is made on an unbiased view of future prospects, improving confidence in the fiscal forecasts, and the publication of this report represents a significant further step taken by this Government to enhance fiscal transparency and management. This Government's commitment to fiscal openness was recognised by the IMF in its 2016 fiscal transparency evaluation which found the UK to be "at the forefront of fiscal reporting practices worldwide". The publication of the FRR today addresses one of the recommendations of that evaluation as well as the findings of recent NAO reports on risks to the public finances. The Government will respond formally to the FRR within the next year, as required under the Charter for Budget Responsibility.

Over the past seven years, the Government have taken important steps to reduce the UK's exposure to fiscal risks. The 2008 crisis was a dramatic illustration of the danger of ignoring potential threats to the public finances. Since 2010, the Government have reduced the country's exposure to fiscal risks through cutting the deficit by three-quarters from its post-war high of 9.9% of GDP, while protecting public services and delivering improved outcomes across health, education and policing and overseen record levels of employment, with over 2.9 million more people into work. The Government have also delivered far reaching reforms to financial supervision which has significantly reduced the likelihood and impact of financial instability. Today, the Government are announcing a new approval regime for Government guarantees and other contingent liabilities representing a further enhancement to the UK's public expenditure control framework which the IMF and other international commentators recognise as being one of the strongest in the world.

Despite this progress, the OBR's report shows that the UK's fiscal position remains vulnerable. The legacy of the great recession remains, with debt forecast to peak this year at almost 90% of GDP—its highest level in 50 years. The unprecedented deficit that the Government inherited in 2010, which the Government have been cutting since 2010, and which saw us spend £4 for every £3 we raised in tax, is the cause of the rapid increase in debt. This report examines a broad spectrum of risks, and illustrates the potential impact on the public finances of a number of these risks materialising at the same time through an innovative "fiscal stress test". Failing to have a credible plan to get the debt down would expose the UK to greater risk, which could have devastating consequences for our public services in the event of a new shock. The report also highlights risks from an ageing society and the erosion of tax bases.

That is why the Government remain determined to learn the lessons of the past and bolster the UK's fiscal resilience. The Government's fiscal rules are designed to guide the public finances back to balance at a pace sensitive to the needs of the economy. The structural deficit must be below 2% of GDP and debt must be falling as a share of GDP by 2020-21. The OBR forecasts

that the Government are on track to meet both of their fiscal targets and that debt will start falling as a share of GDP before the end of the decade. It is vitally important that we continue with our plan to get the debt to GDP ratio down to improve our resilience and address the risks highlighted by the report.

The Government are also working to ensure fiscal sustainability over the long term. The Government are taking important steps to enhance the UK's long-run productivity. Since 2010 there has been over a quarter of a trillion pounds of public and private investment in infrastructure. Looking ahead, the Government are investing more in economic infrastructure, innovation and housing through the £23 billion national productivity investment fund by 2021-22. They are also transforming technical education for 16 to 19-year-olds through the introduction of T-levels, increasing by over 50% the number of hours of training, and including a high-quality three-month work placement for every student, giving young people the technical skills they need to succeed in the world of work, and businesses the edge they need to compete in the global economy. Stronger growth through raising productivity is the only sustainable way to deliver economic resilience, higher real wages and increased living standards in the long run.

[HCWS46]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Agriculture and Fisheries Council

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** Agriculture and Fisheries Council will take place on 17 and 18 July in Brussels.

As the provisional agenda stands, the primary focus for fisheries will be a presentation by the Commission on the state of play of the common fisheries policy and consultation on the fishing opportunities for 2018.

On agriculture, there will be a debrief on the outcome of the recent trilogue discussions concerning the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on organic production and labelling of organic products.

The Council will also exchange views on modernising and simplifying the common agricultural policy, implementation of the May 2015 Council conclusions, trade-related agricultural issues and wine labelling.

The Estonian presidency, whose presidency term commenced on 1 July, will present their six-month work programme to the Council.

There are currently 11 items scheduled under any other business:

A European One Health Action Plan against antimicrobial resistance (tabled by the Commission).

African swine fever: state of play (tabled by the Commission).

Symposium on the future of food in the EU (Brussels, 27 June 2017) (tabled by the Maltese, Slovak and Netherlands delegations).

The consequences of the mandatory food origin labelling on the internal market (tabled by the Belgian delegation).

Meeting on dual quality of foodstuffs (Bratislava, 30 May 2017) (tabled by the Slovak delegation).

Dual quality of foodstuffs—presentation of the latest study (tabled by the Czech delegation).

Meeting of the Ministers of agriculture of the Visegrad Group countries and Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia (Nadarzyn near Warsaw, 2 June 2017) (tabled by the Polish delegation).

Trade practices applied by third countries vis-a-vis EU-responsible EU member states (tabled by the Czech delegation).

International ministerial conference on “GMO free agriculture: a chance for rural development in Central and South Eastern Europe” (Vienna, 9-10 May 2017) (tabled by the Austrian delegation).

AU-EU agriculture ministerial conference on “Making Sustainable Agriculture a Future for Youth in Africa” (Rome, 2 July 2017) (tabled by the Commission).

Drought in Portugal (tabled by the Portuguese delegation).

Until exit negotiations are concluded, the UK remains a full member of the European Union and all the rights and obligations of EU membership remain in force. The outcome of these negotiations will determine what arrangements apply in relation to EU legislation in future once the UK has left the EU.

[HCWS42]

### United Nations Ocean Conference

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** I would like to update the House on the recent United Nations ocean conference, held in New York from 5 - 9 June. Although I was unable to attend due to the pre-election period Defra's deputy director for marine policy led the United Kingdom delegation. I wish to convey to the House the global importance of the conference and summarise its key outcomes.

The UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development, commonly referred to as SDGs or the UN 2030 agenda, are a collection of 17 goals that set the global environment and development agenda from 2016 to 2030. They cut across all areas of Government, from ending poverty and achieving gender equality through to tackling climate change and using resources sustainably.

The conference was an attempt to galvanise international action on the implementation of SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. This SDG tackles a range of marine issues such as marine pollution and ocean acidification.

It produced two major outcomes: a call for action and a registry of over 1300 voluntary commitments made by the global community to support the implementation of SDG14.

I am pleased to report that, through our statement to the conference, the UK Government were able to demonstrate our continued support for the SDG process. We recognise the delivery of SDG 14 has a particular significance for small island developing states and least developed countries and that we would continue to support the Commonwealth marine economies programme, in developing sustainable ocean economies, alleviating poverty, and mitigating the effects of climate change and environmental threats.

The UK Government statement noted that climate change and ocean acidification continue to be significant threats to the long term health of our oceans. We highlighted the major role the UK played in securing the Paris Agreement and reiterated our commitment to its implementation.



I am also pleased to report that, recognising the need to take action on pollution from land-based sources, including the increasing amount of plastics and microplastics, the UK was able to sign up to the UN environment clean seas campaign.

The expertise of our marine science industry was demonstrated through the successful ocean acidification event led by the UK.

The UK also made four voluntary commitments to support the implementation of SDG14, highlighting our work on marine protected areas, including in the overseas territories; marine science; marine litter and the Commonwealth marine economies programme. These can be viewed on the conference website at:

<https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/>

The call for action was agreed by consensus at the conference although the United States dissociated itself from the language on the WTO and recalled the US administration position on the Paris Agreement. The call highlights particular action to be taken on a number of issues including: the need to increase scientific knowledge, prevention of pollution, in particular from plastics; delivering sustainable fisheries and improving access to market for small scale artisanal fisheries in developing countries; concluding negotiations in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on fishery subsidies; and encouraging active engagement in the discussions on the development of an international legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. The call for action is available at:

<https://oceanconference.un.org/callforaction>

[HCWS44]

## EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

### EU Exit: July Negotiating Round

**The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis):** Next week the UK's negotiating team will travel to Brussels for the second round of talks, continuing our journey towards a new, deep and special partnership between the UK and the EU.

Today, in advance of those discussions, I am publishing three position papers that the UK negotiating team will discuss with our EU counterparts next week.

#### *Ongoing Union judicial and administrative proceedings*

The UK's departure from the EU will end the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in the UK. However, there will be cases before the CJEU that involve the UK as a party on the day of the UK's withdrawal, which by definition relate to the period when the UK was a member of the EU. These will need to be resolved satisfactorily as part of a smooth and orderly exit. A similar issue arises for EU administrative procedures involving the UK.

#### *Nuclear safeguards and materials*

The UK will withdraw from EURATOM when it leaves the EU. However, the UK and the EU have a strong mutual interest in continuing to co-operate on civil nuclear matters, harnessing shared expertise and maximising shared interests, for instance in nuclear research and development. As part of our orderly

withdrawal and to provide certainty to industry, it is therefore important the negotiating teams work through issues relating to nuclear materials and non-proliferation (safeguards).

#### *Privileges and immunities*

The UK recognises the need for certain privileges and immunities to apply for a limited period after exit, in order to allow the EU a reasonable time in which to wind up its current operations in the UK. Looking ahead to the deep and special partnership, the UK wants to put in place a legally acceptable framework of privileges and immunities that allows for the smooth conduct of relations between the UK and the EU.

In addition to discussing these and other technical withdrawal issues next week, the two negotiating teams will also focus on citizens' rights, the question of a financial settlement, and Northern Ireland and Ireland.

On citizens' rights, the Government's priority remains providing certainty as soon as possible to EU citizens living in the UK, and UK nationals in the EU. To that end, we will use next week's round to review the technical elements of the EU and UK proposals, identifying areas of alignment and those where further work is required by both parties.

On the financial settlement, as set out in the Prime Minister's letter to President Tusk, the Government have been clear that we will work with the EU to determine a fair settlement of the UK's rights and obligations as a departing member state, in accordance with the law and in the spirit of our continuing partnership. The Government recognise that the UK has obligations to the EU, and the EU obligations to the UK, that will survive the UK's withdrawal—and that these need to be resolved.

Finally, in June, I agreed with Michel Barnier to establish a dialogue on Northern Ireland and Ireland, which in recognition of its importance is led by the UK and EU co-ordinators. Both parties are committed to the Belfast agreement, avoiding a return to a hard border, ensuring that nothing is done that jeopardises the peace process, and preserving the common travel area and associated arrangements. Our focus next week will be on discussing how to ensure the preservation of the common travel area, and to restate our shared commitment to the Belfast agreement.

The position papers published today are available on the Government website, and I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The Government will publish further position papers on other issues in due course, providing more information to business and individuals, and informing our negotiations with the EU. In addition, the Government will publish technical notes shared with the EU, and may agree joint publications with the EU as part of the ongoing negotiations.

[HCWS43]

## HEALTH

### Ambulance Response Programme

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** I am today announcing the publication of the University of Sheffield report on the ambulance response programme and subsequent recommendations by Sir Bruce Keogh, NHS England's national medical director. The report

evaluates a series of pilots that I announced to the House in my written statement of 6 January 2015, intended to support ambulance services in England to maintain and improve clinical outcomes for patients in the face of unprecedented increases in demand. Copies of the report and Sir Bruce's recommendations are attached.

Based on the extensive evidence base detailed in the report, NHS England is proposing a new framework of ambulance performance standards and related operational changes that are focused on patients' clinical needs and will help the service to operate more efficiently. In particular:

enabling ambulances to dispatch resources much more clearly based on the clinical needs of patients ensuring the consistent delivery of very rapid responses to those who genuinely need them, through putting in place a four tier response time based on the clinical needs of patients;

introducing specific standards for stroke and heart attack, aimed at ensuring patients start the right treatment in hospital as quickly as possible;

improving performance management of "tail" waits by introducing mean and 90th centile measures; and,

achieving greater consistency and transparency for less urgent calls by bringing all response standards into a consistent national framework.

These ambulance response times are more stringent than anywhere else in the UK. Moreover, evidence from the pilots suggest that these changes will be beneficial for rural populations, narrowing the gap which currently exists in the time it takes for an ambulance resource to transport patients to hospital.

In my statement in January 2015 I said I would apply the following three tests before extending the ambulance response programme:

there is clear clinical consensus that the proposed change will be beneficial to patient outcomes as a whole, and will act to reduce overall clinical risk in the system;

there is evidence from the analysis of existing data and piloting that the proposed change will have the intended benefits, and is safe for patients; and,

there is an associated increase in operational efficiency. The aim is to reduce the average number of vehicles allocated to each 999 call and the ambulance utilisation rate.

I have accepted Sir Bruce's advice that these tests have been met. I am authorising NHS England to implement the ambulance response programme recommendations in all ambulance services in England so that patients across the country will benefit from the improvements seen in the pilot ambulance services.

1. Report on Ambulance Response Programme (ARPreport\_Final.pdf)

2. Letter with Sir Bruce Keogh's recommendations (13.7.17 Jeremy Hunt - Ambulance Response Programme letter.pdf)

The above documents can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-07-13/HCWS45/> .

[HCWS45]

## TRANSPORT

### Aviation Update

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** In October 2016, the Government selected a new north-west runway at Heathrow as its preferred scheme for delivering new airport capacity in the south-east.

In February a consultation on a draft airports national policy statement was launched, which set out the reasons for this preference, along with the mitigation and compensation measures the Government expect the promoter to put in place if planning permission is to be granted.

The consultation closed on 25 May and the work to analyse the over 70,000 responses is progressing well. I would like to thank all of those who contributed their views.

The Government are fully committed to realising the benefits that a new northwest runway at Heathrow would bring, in terms of economic growth, boosting jobs and skills, strengthening domestic links and critically, increasing and developing our international connectivity as we prepare to leave the European Union.

The timing of the election, in particular the need to re-start a Select Committee inquiry into the draft airports NPS means we now expect to lay any final NPS in Parliament in the first half of 2018, for a vote in the House of Commons.

I will provide a further update to the House after the summer recess on our next steps following analysis of the consultation responses.

Today I am also publishing a response to the consultation held earlier this year on a new night flight regime for Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. I am fully aware that noise is a major concern for those living near these airports, and that night noise is widely regarded as the most disturbing impact of aviation. While advances in new technology mean that aircraft are generally getting quieter, the limits governing night noise at these airports has not kept pace with these developments.

The new rules we are publishing today will encourage the use of quieter aircraft at all three airports by reducing the amount of noise these airports are legally allowed to make, and will give local residents a five year guarantee about the level of noise that they will be exposed to. This decision strikes a balance between managing the impacts on local communities by locking in the benefits offered by recent technological developments, with the economic benefits of night flights.

This decision should be seen as a signal that the Government take this issue very seriously, which is why we expect a ban on scheduled night flights of 6.5 hours at an expanded Heathrow. We will also explore whether there is more we can do, including considering further legislation to incentivise the industry more generally to invest in the quietest aircraft and operate them in the quietest way.

Strong international links are critical to the future prosperity of our country, with a world-class hub airport and thriving aviation sector central to this. We are committed to realising the economic and social benefits aviation has to offer, while taking seriously the need to balance this with managing the local and environmental impacts of aviation.

[HCWS41]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Pensions

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr David Gauke):** In February this year, the Department for Work and Pensions published a Green Paper looking at

what more needs to be done to ensure consumer confidence and secure the future of defined benefit (final salary) pensions schemes.

Building on this Green Paper, the Department intends to publish a White Paper later this year which will set out proposed next steps on what reform is needed to support the sector. It will address the commitments in the Government's manifesto in relation to the regulation and rules governing defined benefit private pensions. The paper will also consider innovative delivery structures, such as consolidation and measures to drive efficiency within the sector.

While the sector is broadly working as intended, the White Paper will consider the need to evolve and adapt the regulatory regime to improve security for members.

With more than £1.5 trillion invested in these schemes, people need to have confidence that they are resilient and robustly regulated.

The Government wish to ensure that the defined benefit pensions system continues to balance the needs of consumers, the schemes themselves and business for the future.

Throughout the Green Paper process the Department has worked closely with a range of external stakeholders to develop sensible policy proposals. We are grateful to those who have contributed to the consultation and it is our strong intention that this collaboration should continue throughout the White Paper process.

[HCWS48]



# Petition

*Thursday 13 July 2017*

## OBSERVATIONS

### HEALTH

#### **Closure of King George Hospital Accident and Emergency Department**

*The petition of residents of the UK,*

Declares that the petitioners are against the closure of the A&E department at King George Hospital in Ilford.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to undertake a review of the original decision to close King George Hospital A&E and in particular the criteria used which the petitioners believe are now out of date.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by *Wes Streeting, Official Report*, 26 April 2017; Vol. 624, c. 1186.]

[P002041]

*Observations from the Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne):*

There is an ongoing process by the local STP Board to revalidate and assure that the original decision to close the King George Hospital A&E remains appropriate.

NHS England has confirmed that the criteria used in the decision are still relevant. They are the standard criteria used in these cases and have been applied by North East London STP as part of their delivery plan.



# ORAL ANSWERS

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# PETITION

Thursday 13 July 2017

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No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than**  
**Thursday 20 July 2017**

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